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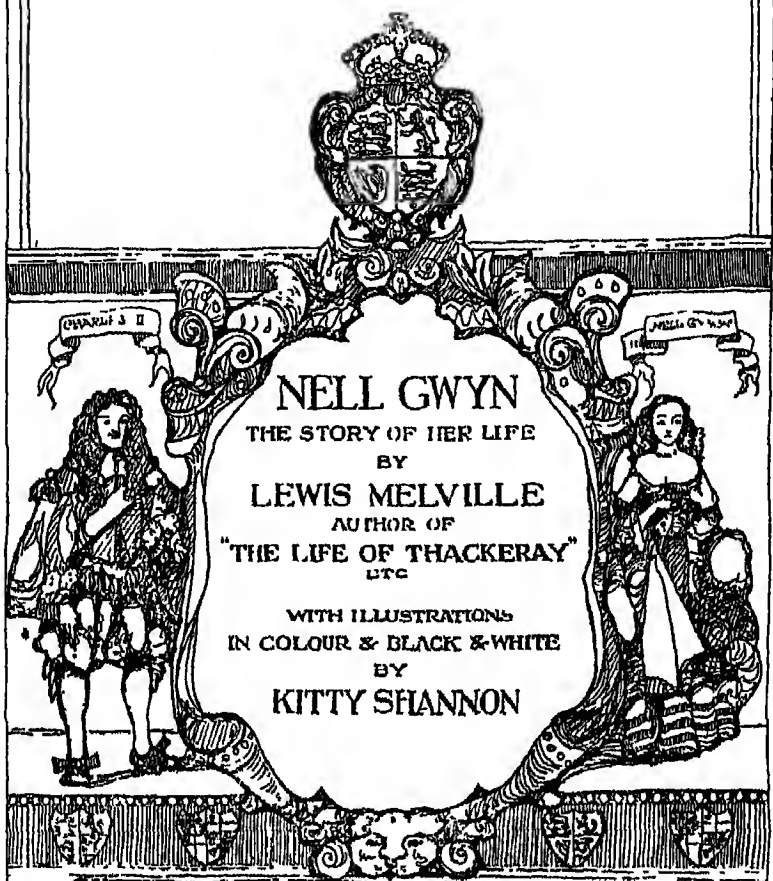


NELL GWYN



Charles II, Nell Gwyn, Duchess of Portsmouth and Duchess  
of Mazarin.

*Frontispiece*



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SOME ASPECTS OF THACKERAY  
VICTORIAN NOVELISTS  
THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF LAURENCE STERNE  
THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF WILLIAM BECKFORD  
OF PONTILL  
THE LIFE OF JOHN GAY

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF WILLIAM COBBETT  
THE BERRY PAPERS  
THE LIFE OF PHILIP, DUKE OF WILMINGTON  
THE FIRST GEORGE  
"FARMER GEORGE"  
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AN INJURED QUEEN: CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK  
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SOME ECCENTRICS AND A WOMAN  
THE SOUTH SEA BUBBLE  
THE WINDHAM PAPERS: With an Introduction by The  
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THE WELLESLEY PAPERS

BATH UNDER BEAU NASH  
BRIGHTON: ITS FOLLIES, ITS FASHIONS AND ITS  
HISTORY  
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

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# NELL GWYN

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**R**OMANCE has claimed Nell Gwyn for its own, even as it has, with less of reason, claimed her royal lover.

Of all the mistresses of Charles II., Lady Castlemaine, Hortense Mancini, Louise de K roualle, and the rest, only Nell Gwyn secured popularity. The others were well and soundly and quite rightly hated. With the London apprentices Nell Gwyn was always a favourite, as is proved by an oft told story : she was driving through the City in her coach, and, being mistaken for the Roman Catholic Duchess of Portsmouth, another mistress of the King, was hooted ; whereupon she leant out of the window, and cried, "Pray, good people, be civil. I am the Protestant whore." And so drove on, amidst cheers.

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## Nell Gwyn

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Nell Gwyn has become an historic figure. She has taken her place as the most popular woman in the annals of Britain. We admire Boadicca, but we love Nell Gwyn. Nelson's Lady Hamilton was far more lovely, but not nearly, in fact, not at all, adorable—and, after all, Emma never captured the heart of a British King, and a Stuart at that.

All sorts of legends, resounding to her credit, have sprung up around Nell Gwyn. She is credited with having suggested to Charles II. the idea of Chelsea Hospital for old soldiers, and though the official historian of that institution could find no evidence to confirm this, the tradition is still widely accepted. Numerous stories are told of her generosity and her kindness of heart. Incorrigible sentimentalists throw bouquets at her continuously. To-day, nearly two hundred and fifty years after her death, she has thousands of loving admirers for every one she had in her lifetime. Her memory is kept fresh by taverns bearing her name, in Bull Inn Court, Strand, in the King's Road, and in the Pimlico Road.

In her own day Burnet and the staid John Evelyn wrote harshly of Nell Gwyn, and Rochester and Sir George Etherege lampooned her vilely and obscenely ; but she captured the hearts of all writers of a later date, including her biographers. The anonymous author of an account of her career, which was published in 1752, declared :

"She was a lady of distinguished talents ; she wanted neither wit, beauty, and benevolence ; and if she deserves blame for want of chastity, there

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## Introductory

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are few who challenge such lavish encomiums for other moral qualities."

And Colley Cibber is at pains to find excuses for her :

" The reverend Historian of his Own Time, Bishop Burnet, styled her 'the indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a Court,' but if we consider her in all the disadvantages of her rank and education, she does not appear to have had any criminal errors more remarkable than her sex's frailty to answer for : And if the same Author, in the latter end of that Prince's life, seems to reproach his memory with too kind a concern for her support we may allow that it becomes a Bishop to have had no eyes or taste for the frivolous charms or playful badinage of a King's Mistress : Yet doubted, she has less to be laid to her charge than any other of those Ladies who were in the same preferment : She never meddled in matters of serious moment, or was the tool of working politicians : Never broke into amorous infidelities which others in that grave Author are accused of ; but was as visibly distinguish'd by her particular personal inclination to the King, as her rivals were by their titles of grandeur."

These extracts are given as examples of the way in which Nell Gwyn was regarded in the eighteenth century.

A very pretty wench Nell Gwyn must have been—beautiful she never was. She had an exquisite, rather full figure, and was short in stature ; she had reddish-brown hair and delightful twinkling eyes that almost closed when she smiled ; the tiniest feet

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## Nell Gwyn

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possible and the smallest hands. She had an immense vitality and a robustious Cockney humour. These qualities, together with her invariable good temper and her merry fooling, and a freedom of speech that was more than Rabelaisian, made her a delight to the gallants of the day.

As we shall see, even at the age of fourteen, she attracted the attentions of a city merchant whose name is still a matter of dispute, of Lacy the dramatist and comedian, and of Hart the actor, and accepted them either in turn, or, what is more probable, all together. And it is by no means certain that any one of this trio was her first lover. Life began very early for those brought up in the stews of Drury Lane in the seventeenth century.

Nell Gwyn had charm—which is a happy accident ; but she used it delightfully—which is an art. And her charm has survived her.

“ And once Nell Gwyn, a frail young sprite,  
Look'd kindly when I met her ;  
I shook my head perhaps,—but quite  
Forgot to quite forget her,”

so that most fastidious of writers of light verse, Frederick Locker-Lampson, conjured her up. He thought of her more than once, indeed, and introduced her in his “ Lines to a Human Skull ” :

“ It may have held (to aim some random shots)  
Thy brains, Eliza Fry's, or Baron Byron's,  
The wits of Nelly Gwyn, or Dr. Watts,—  
Two quoted bards. Two philanthropic sirens.”

To introduce Nell Gwyn into a play or a novel is

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## Introductory

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to ensure its success. Douglas Jerrold did it effectively in a comedy. Mr. Frankfort Moore has written a series of stories of which she is the principal figure. "Anthony Hope" wove his spells around her in a novel, "Simon Dale," which he dramatized as *English Nell* for Miss Marie Tempest. The fascination of Nell Gwyn has been felt also in America, and Mr. Paul Kester wrote *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*, in which the title-rôle was played there by Miss Ada Rehan and here by Miss Julia Neilson. "Anthony Hope's" pen-picture of Nell is worth quoting: "Her sunny brown hair was about her shoulders, her knuckles rubbed her sleepy eyes to brightness, and a loose white bodice, none too high nor too carefully buttoned about the neck, showed that her dressing was not done. Indeed, she made a pretty picture, as she leant out, laughing softly, and now shading her face from the sun with one hand, while she raised the other in mocking reproof of the preacher."

Nell Gwyn's circumstances having been what they were, there must indeed have been something very special about her that enabled her to escape falling into the ranks of the ordinary "unfortunates" of the day, to secure the attention of men of high position, and undoubted wit, and not merely to attract but to hold—to some degree, at least—the wandering affection of Charles II. for the last fourteen years of his life. Even James II., not a warm-blooded man, liked her right well—well enough, in fact, to provide for her material comfort after the death of his brother, even though it was at the expense of the State.

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## Nell Gwyn

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She certainly never had a chance to be other than she became. It is doubtful if even her mother knew who Nell's father was, for the less said about "old Madam Gwyn" the better, though it must be allowed that a good deal was said about her in her own day, and none of it was polite. She was a great deal worse than "not so good as she might be," she was indeed an infamous woman, and when, in one of her many drunken bouts, she stepped into a ditch near Westminster and was drowned, probably only her daughter in all the world lamented her.

As a child Nell Gwyn served "strong waters" to the visitors to the notorious Madame Ross's brothel; was then promoted to be an orange-girl at Drury Lane Theatre—and orange-girls were notorious for their contempt of morality; and so to the stage, through the influence of one or another of her lovers at the age of fourteen. What the standard of conduct for an actress was in those days will presently be indicated.

When this pretty, attractive little baggage caught the eye of Charles II. she was about nineteen, and what her life for the last five years had been may be guessed. Indeed, she made no secret of it. She called the King, to his face, her Charles the Third, because, she told him, she had lived with two others of the name—who we know to have been Charles Hart and Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst. Again, when she heard that her footman had been fighting with another who had called her by an opprobrious epithet, she told him, in good round terms, not to be

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such a fool, and in future to fight, if fight he must, in a better cause.

Yet Nell Gwyn, in spite of her early irregularities, contrived to keep her heart pure. There was never at any time any vice in her.

She can scarcely have found much difference between the morals of Whitehall and those of Lewknor Lane or Whetstone Park. Yet she alone of all Charles's mistresses really cared for him and was faithful to him—to the great surprise, one can conjecture, of that dissolute, cynical monarch, who, however, came in time to believe it, but never ceased to his last hour to be amazed at the miracle.

It is pleasant to be able to record that on his death-bed he said to his brother, "Let not poor Nelly starve."

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGINS OF NELL GWYN

The obscurity of Nell Gwyn's origin.—Her birth.—The doubt as to her birthplace.—The claims of Oxford, Hereford and London.—Rumoured that her father died in prison at Oxford.—The identity of her father.—Her coat of arms.—Her legitimacy.—Her real name.—Her mother a disreputable person.—Mrs. Gwyn drowned, "being in drink."—Lampoons on Mrs. Gwyn.—Nell Gwyn's affection for her mother.—Nell Gwyn's sister Rose.—Other relations.—Francis Gwynne no connection.

**T**HE origin of Eleanor Gwyn is obscure in every sense. The only fact that has been brought to light is a horoscope, preserved among the Ashmore papers in the Museum at Oxford, which states that she was born on February 2, 1650-1. It is perhaps worthy of mention, for those interested in such speculations, that the stars were supposed at the time of her birth to be in the ascendant.

It has been variously declared that she was born at Oxford, at Hereford, and in London ; but the point never has been, and now probably never will be, settled. The Oxford theory has the least support : Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe mentions that when he first went to Oxford, Dr. John Ireland, an antiquary, assured him that Nelly was born in that city, and he adds, what is certainly beyond question, that two of the titles of her elder son, Headington and Burford, were taken from Oxfordshire localities. The only

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## The Origins of Nell Gwyn

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thing to be urged in support of Oxford as the birthplace is a mention in Rochester's "Panegyrick to Nell" that her father died in prison at Oxford :

" 'Twas this that rais'd her Charity so high,  
To visit those that did in Durance lie ;  
From Oxford prisons many did she free,  
There dy'd her Father, and there glory'd she,  
In giving others Life and Liberty  
So pious a Remembrance still she bore  
Ev'n to the Fetters that her Father wore."

But this does not take us far, unless we assume that the father died while she was a child—which may well have been the case.

Oxford was always lukewarm as regards the question, but Hereford has consistently pushed its doubtful claims until it has come to believe in them as being without a flaw. There is, however, nothing but tradition upon which to rely, and even this is eked out by conjecture that is not invariably plausible.

Jones, in his "Handbook to Hereford" (1856), makes the following statement on the subject :

"Branching eastward, at the lowest point of Bridge Street, is a narrow thoroughfare, formerly called Pipewell Street, and afterwards Pipe Lane, and now designated Gwynne Street, from the circumstance of its being the birthplace of the celebrated Nell Gwynne. There seems to be some doubt as to whether the exact house was not taken down some years ago ; but a building at the rear of the Royal Oak Inn is usually pointed out as the place." Another authority says that "the birthplace of Nell was within five hundred

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## Nell Gwyn

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yards of the theatre at Hereford . . . The cottage in which she was born was part of the Episcopal Palace garden."

Clarence Hopper, who made careful investigation, could only report that he had "heard" that Nell's father was James Gwyn, and that he had a house in some lane in Hereford, the lease of which was then still extant in the office of a solicitor in the same town.

John Doran, who loved to delve into problems of the sort, tells of a house in Hereford, at the rear of the Royal Oak Inn, which is popularly designated as the birthplace of Nell; while W. P. Courtney (who wrote of Nell Gwyn in the "Dictionary of National Biography") sums up the question by saying simply that historians of Hereford accept the tradition that she was born in a house in Pipe Well Lane, since called Gwyn Lane, in the parish of St. John, Hereford, and that this is confirmed by a slab in the Cathedral.

Peter Cunningham, Nell's biographer, was unable to throw any light on the matter and had to content himself with remarking, "The Hereford story is of some standing, but there is little else, I am afraid, to support it."

The alleged birthplace has been described as a small house of brick and timber, and this had deteriorated into something little better than a hovel when it was pulled down in 1859 to enable the enlargement of the gardens of the Palace of the Bishops of Hereford. In 1883 Dr. James Atlay, the then Bishop, gave his consent to the fixing of a memorial tablet on the outer face of the garden wall, to mark the site of the house



Even at the age of fourteen, she attracted the attentions of a city merchant



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## The Origins of Nell Gwyn

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where the Royal Favourite is supposed to have been born. It was, of course, a coincidence, and nothing more that Lord James Beauclerk, one of the children of Nell Gwyn's elder son, the first Duke of St. Albans, was a Bishop of Hereford (1746-1787).

As regards London, a claim is put in for the Coal Yard, then a low alley, the last on the east side of Drury Lane—which has been renamed Goldsmith Street. This theory was put forward in print in 1721, and was accepted twenty years later by William Oldys, who is generally credited with the authorship of "*The History of the English Stage from the Restoration to the Present Times, including the Lives, Characters and Amours of the most eminent Actors and Actresses,*" which was ascribed to Thomas Betterton (who died in 1710) and published by Edmund Curll, with a dedication to the Duke of Grafton.

To discuss the birthplace of Nell Gwyn before writing of her parents may appear like putting the cart before the horse, but the reason for having done so is that it is apparently impossible to trace her father.

Mention has already been made of one James Gwyn of Hereford, who has been set up as a possible parent, but there are many others suggested for the distinction :

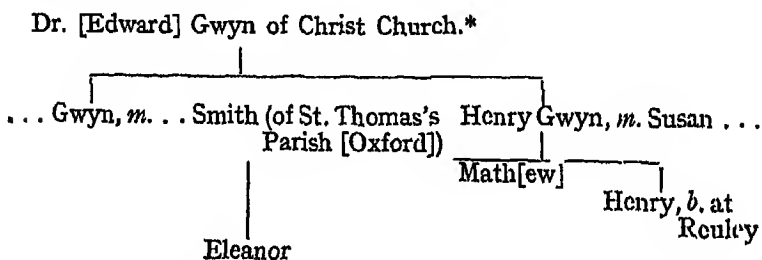
William Oldys describes her as the daughter of a fruiterer in Covent Garden ;

Peter Cunningham mentions that it is said that her father was Captain Thomas Gwyn, of an ancient family in Wales, and, conceding that the name is of Welsh extraction, is prepared to admit the descent without adopting the captaincy ;

## Nell Gwyn

There was a discussion long ago in *Notes and Queries* as to whether the father, who is said to have been called James, was a dilapidated soldier, or a fruiterer of Drury Lane (the fruiterer legend is mentioned by Cunningham); and

Anthony Wood, in his "Life and Times," gives the following pedigree :



To make the solution more difficult, in the index to the "Life and Times," the reference is to "Ellen or Eleanor (*née* Smith)."

David Gwyn, whose name is affixed to a petition of parishioners of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London, which is undated but was read on January 24, 1653, is also put forward.

In fact, nothing whatever is known as to who was the father.

It may be mentioned, however, that Nell Gwyn used a coat of arms.

Clarence Hopper was fortunate enough to discover that her arms were done at the "public workhouse," which may be presumed to be a place used by a company of herald painters, in 1687, the year of her death,

\* Edward Gwyn, M.A., installed Canon of the fourth stall in Christ Church, May 11, 1615; died August 24, 1624.

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## The Origins of Nell Gwyn

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and from the work-book under that date they appear to have been per pale, arg. and or, a lion rampant, azure. Also, later, he saw another herald's work-book of the same year, wherein is a trick of the arms as just described, with these additions as instructions for funereal insignia : "Madam Gwyn : on a lozenge-atcheivmt : Nl ajesty : salke : 8 dos [en] buck [ram] : 12 shields." In the corner of the coat of arms is the word "Russell," which may be taken as the name of the herald painter.

In the matter of the parentage of Nell Gwyn, there is a further point, which, so far as the present writer is aware, has not been raised, and that is—was Nell legitimate? No proof of the marriage of her mother has been brought to light—though, of course, this in itself is a poor thing in the way of negative evidence, since records in those days were not always carefully kept or preserved. What makes the suggestion plausible that Nell may well have been a love-child is that her mother, from what we know about her, was not the sort of person to care about such a trifling formality as marriage lines.

And, again, what actually was Nell Gwyn's real name? That it was spelt in many different ways is nothing to the point, though in passing, the variations may be noted. The researches of Mr. F. G. Hilton Price have discovered that in the old ledgers of the firm of Child and Rogers, with whom she banked, her cheques and receipts are indifferently signed "Ellen Gwyn," "Ellin Gwyn," "Ellen Gwynne," "Ellen Gwin," "Eleanor Gwyn," and "Eleanor Gwynne."

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## Nell Gwyn

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Her secretary, James Booth, when writing notes for her, called her Madam Gwyn; and her will begins, "I, Ellen Gwynne"—which may be taken as the way the lawyer who drew it up thought it was. When the Duke of St. Albans consented that a paper of requests should be made a codicil to her will, he wrote "Mrs. Gwinn." Pepys referred to her as "Nell" or "Nolly."

There are those, however, who give her an entirely different name. John Doran, in "Their Majesties' Servants," alludes to a tradition that her real name was Margaret Symcott. Certainly in the list of charitable bequests, printed in Manning and Bray's "History of Surrey," which was published in 1814, there are the following entries :

"Bequests to the Prisoners on the Common Side of King's Bench, as hanging up 6th March, 1802 : . . .

"Mrs. Margaret Symcott (*i.e.*, Eleanor Gwyn), 65 penny loaves every 8 weeks.

"Charitable Donations to the Prisoners in the Marshalsea : . . .

"Mrs. Margaret Symcott (*i.e.*, King Charles's Eleanor Gwyn), 65 penny loaves every eight weeks; paid by the Chamberlain, £2 os. od."

Also, it may be noted for what it is worth that when the anonymous "Memoirs of the Life of Eleanor Gwinn, a celebrated courtesan in the reign of King Charles II., and Mistress to that Monarch," which appeared in 1752, was reissued about 1820, John Fairburn, who "edited" it, gave the following new title : "Fairburn's edition of the Life, Amours and Exploits

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## The Origins of Nell Gwyn

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of NELL GWINN, the fortunate orange-girl, who from the above low sphere of life became the bosom friend and mistress of King Charles the Second (of merry memory), and who, for the comfort of old soldiers, was the cause of erecting Chelsea Hospital, with an account of many charities she left and good deeds she performed in her retirement from public life and the stage (as LADY SIMCOCK)." This at least shows that there must have been some tradition to the effect that her name was not Gwyn in any of its forms.

We are on firm ground when we come to Nell Gwyn's mother. Of her we do indeed know something, though that something is far from being to her credit.

Sir George Etherege in "The Lady of Pleasure : A Satyr " refers to Eleanor Gwyn the elder :

"Maid, Punk, and Bawd, full sixty years and more,  
Dy'd drunk with brandy in a common shore ;"

and such other accounts that have come down to us support this account. It would seem that when her charms waned, and she could no longer support herself by them, she made both ends meet, though humbly, by pandering by deputy to the male appetite.

Certainly, as will be seen, Madam Gwyn took little care of her daughters, anyhow of Nell, who, however, to the end had some affection for her. From contemporary accounts it appears that Nell, in the days of prosperity, did not neglect her. She did, indeed, for a while take her mother to live with her, and Peter Cunningham, among the curious bills incurred by her (discovered among the mutilated Exchequer

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## Nell Gwyn

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papers), found an apothecary's account containing charges for "plaisters," "glysters," and "cordials" for "Old Mrs. Gwyn."

It may definitely be said that Mrs. Gwyn was a person with very unpleasing habits, and it may have been for this reason that Nell set her up in an establishment of her own. Mrs. Gwyn died in 1679, being then in her fifty-seventh year. As the mother of a King's Mistress, her demise did not—unfortunately for her fame—pass without notice.

In *Domestic Intelligence* for August 5th of that year is the announcement: "We hear that Madam Ellen Gwyn's mother, sitting lately by the water-side at her house by the Neat-Houses, near Chelsea, fell accidentally into the water and was drowned."

Narcissus Luttrell, in his "Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714," is a little more precise in his account, and gives full credence to the current gossip about the much-talked of weakness of the old woman: "Mrs. Gwyn, mother to Miss Ellen Gwyn, being in drink, was drowned in a ditch near Westminster."

That this failing was common knowledge is proved by the contemporary writers on her death. There has been preserved more than one lampoon printed at the time. One of these, in which it is said of her in relation to the cause of her death that "so corpulent a mass of flesh would have outvied Neptune's strength to have delivered her straight on shore," has the following imposing title:

"A True Account of the late most doleful and lamentable

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## The Origins of Nell Gwyn

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table tragedy of Old Maddam Gwinn, mother of Eleanor Gwinn, who was unfortunately drowned in a fish-pond at her own mansion-house, near the Neat-Houses, with an account how that much to be deplored accident came to pass and what is expected to be the sequel of the same. With an Epitaph, composed against the solemnity of her pompous funeral, and many other circumstances." From this may be quoted the following extracts :

" But oh, the cruel Fate of some senister Star that ruled her Birth, she there expired, and left the First to be the Executor of her Will to this sad and dismal Tragedy, the which has caused a universal grief among the bucksom *Bona-Robas*. So that it is generally believed, that upon so Tragical occasion, the Pallace and the Fish-pond will be forfeited to her most vertuous Daughter Maddam Ellen Gwin, as Lady of the Soil, and chief of all the *Bona-Robas* that the Suburban Schools of Venus late have fitted for the Game. And now in Gratitude to this good Matron's Memory, to be imposed upon her Tomb-Stone at the approaching Solemnisation we have composed this Epitaph as followest :

" Here lies the Victim of a cruel Fate,  
Whom too much Element did Ruinate ;  
'Tis something strange, but yet most wondrous true,  
That what we live by, should our Lives undo.  
She that so oft had powerful Waters try'd,  
At last with silence, in a Fish-pond dy'd.  
Fate was unjust, for had he prov'd but kind,  
To make it Brandy, he had pleas'd her Mind."

There is also a black-bordered broadside, " An Elegy upon that never to be forgotten Matron, Old

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## Nell Gwyn

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Madamm Gwinn, who was unfortunately drown'd in her own fishpond, on the 19th of July, 1679," in which are the following passages :

" But since she's gone, our tipsters need not fear ;  
For while she liv'd true *Nants* was monstrous deer.  
Yet *Brandy-Merchants* sure have cause to grieve,  
Because her fate admits of no reprieve,  
Die in their debts she could not, yet they'l find  
Their trade decay'd, for none is left behind ;  
That in one day could twenty quarts consume,  
And bravely vaunt, she durst it twice presume.

" For this good matron, that so well was fed,  
By lean-jaw'd Death was into bondage led.  
I will not say with Typhon's her vast bulk  
Orespread nine acres, yet her mighty hulk  
Six foot in compass was suppos'd to be,  
Too ponderous for a common destinie.  
No Fate when she was sober durst assail  
Her well-built structure, nor could aught prevail,  
Too strong the basis were, whereon she stood ;  
That solid mass, compos'd with flesh and blood  
Had not perfidious legs and feet betray'd,  
The Element could not have conquest made."

### " EPITAPH.

" There lies intomb'd with this marble pile,  
The wonder of her sex, who for a while  
Fate durst not venture on, but taking breath  
He has refin'd her to the arms of Death.  
Readers, lament ! for seldom shall you find  
The weaker sex to bear so strong a mind.  
Strengthened with all the virtues Franco or th' Rhine,  
England and Spain could infuse from wine.  
But Bacchus, unkind, did tempt her to ingage,  
Where she expired by subtle Neptune's rage.  
The fate was cruel, yet the fame remains ;  
For drinking, none like her the world contains.  
So after-ages then, a statue raise,  
That we may eternalize her—praise."

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## The Origins of Nell Gwyn

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Nell Gwyn did not, indeed, raise a statue to her mother on the lines suggested by the writer of the above verses, but she did charge herself with the burial, which was conducted with such splendour as to excite the ire of Rochester who, in "A Panegyrick on Nelly," wrote :

"Nor was her Mother's Funeral less her care,  
No cost, no velvet did the Daughter spare :  
Five gilded 'Scutcheons did the Herse inrich,  
To celebrate this Martyr of the Ditch.  
Burnt Brandy did in flaming Brummers flow,  
Drank at her Funeral, while her well-pleas'd Shade  
Rejoyc'd, ev'n in the sober Fields below,  
At all the drunkenness her Death had made."

Mrs. Gwyn was buried in the church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and her daughter erected a monument to her in the south aisle, bearing the inscription :

"Here lies interred the body of Helena Gwynn, born in this parish, who departed this life ye 20th of July, MDCLXXIX, in the LXI yeare of her age."

The monument was pulled down when the church was rebuilt in 1721.

That Nell was sincerely grieved by the death of her mother is made clear by the author of "Satyr Unmuzzled," who certainly intended to jeer at her rather than to pay tribute to her good heart :

"Her Mother griev'd in muddy Ale and Sack  
To think her Child should ever prove a *Crack* ;  
When she was drunk she always fell asleep,  
And when full maudlin, then the whore would weep ;  
Her tears were brandy, Mundungus her breath,  
Bawd was her Life, and Common-Shore her Death.  
To see her Daughter mourn for such a Beast  
Is like her Life, which makes up but one Jest."

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## Nell Gwyn

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In her will Nell Gwyn expressed the wish that she should be buried in the same church, and subsequently her remains were interred in the same tomb as her mother.

"Old Madam Gwyn" had another daughter, Rose, who married at some date unknown a Captain John Cassells, who has been described upon doubtful authority as "a man of some fortune, who spent it in the service of the Crown." If there is truth in that statement, it may be assumed that he lent money to Charles II. during the Commonwealth. Mr. Gordon Goodwin, in his admirably annotated edition of Cunningham's "Story of Nell Gwyn," expressed the belief that this man was no other than the highwayman and burglar of that name. He had friends at Court, powerful friends, for when he was arrested in 1667 as a disorderly person, he contrived to secure his release. When four years later Cassells was again apprehended, in a petition to the King he successfully asked pardon for "being reduced to aid in the robbing of Sir Henry Littleton's house, his father having lost a plentiful estate in Ireland for his loyalty, and he having served under his Majesty as ensign till the Restoration."

As regards Rose, Mr. Goodwin thinks she is probably identical with the Rose Gwynne who, in December, 1663, was imprisoned in Newgate for robbery. "She possessed influence enough to gain a reprieve before judgment at the Old Bailey, and she was visited in prison by the King's favourite, the well-known Thomas Killigrew, and the Duke of York's cup-bearer

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(Browne)." Mr. Goodwin writes: "On December 26, she wrote to Browne begging him to obtain her release on bail from this woeful place of torment until a pardon is pleaded. Her father, she adds, lost all he had in service of the late King, and it is hard she should perish in a gaol. A few days later she obtained her discharge."

This is supported by a writer in *Notes and Queries*, who set forth the result of his investigations: "I would mention that recently I lighted on a foul draught warrant entry-book of Charles II., wherein one entry was made concerning Rose Gwyn, who seems to have been convicted of an offence (left blank in the original) at the Old Bailey; and although convicted, was reprieved by the Bench before judgment, doubtless owing to some powerful interference. She was afterwards discharged upon bail, with a view to her ultimate pardon. The name Rose Gwyn, the period 1663, the extraordinary clemency exercised, form a curious coincidence, and would almost permit of a presumption that this was none other than the sister Rose of the beauteous mistress of the 'merry monarch.'"

The document runs as follows:

"Whereas we are given to understand that Rose Gwynne having been convicted of — at the late sessions held at the Old Bailey, was yet reprieved by y<sup>e</sup> bench before judgment and reserved as an object of our princely compassion and mercy, upon humble suite made to us in favour of y<sup>e</sup> said Rose, we have thought good hereby to signify our Royal pleasure unto you, that you forthw<sup>th</sup> grant her her

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## Nell Gwyn

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liberty and discharge upon good bail first taken in order to y<sup>e</sup> sueing out her pardon, and rendering our gracious mercy and compassion to be effectual. For which, &c., dated Dec<sup>r</sup>, 1663.

“ By His Ma<sup>ty</sup> Command,

“ H. B.”

If the two Rose Gwyns are, in fact, identical, it is evident from the dates that Nell was the younger girl, for in 1673 she was only thirteen, and already Rose was on terms of intimacy with such men about town as Killigrew and Browne, whom it is not uncharitable to assume were at one time or another her lovers.

Cassells died in 1675, leaving his widow without means, and Charles II. granted her a pension of £200 a year, probably at the instance of Nell. This was continued to her by James II., but ceased when William and Mary came to the throne. It may be that she was no longer in straitened circumstances, for she married again, one Forster. He did not long survive, for in 1694 she was again a widow. This assumption is borne out by the terms of Nell Gwyn's will, for Nell, who was obviously devoted to her sister, would almost certainly have made better provision for her had it been necessary, instead of, for instance, leaving Lady Fairborne and John Warner, her chaplain, fifty pounds each to buy a ring. Nell, in a codicil to her will, dated October 18th, 1687, desired, “ That Mrs. Rose Forster may have two hundred pounds given her any time within a year after my decease,” and supplemented this in a second codicil made on

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July 19th in the following year, a few months before her death, in which, "The said Mrs. Ellen Gwinne did give and bequeath to Mrs. Rose Forster her sister the summe of two hundred pounds over and above the summe of two hundred pounds which shee gave to the said Rose in her former Codicill." At the same time she left to Forster "a ring of the value of forty pounds or forty pounds to buy him a ring."

What other relations Nell may have had is not known. In a codicil in her will she expressed the desire, "that my kinsman, Mr. Cholmly, may have one hundred pounds given to him, within a year of this date," but who this Cholmly was has not been discovered. It is mentioned in the satires of the day that Nell had a cousin who from "the menial office of one of the black guard employed in carrying coals at Court" was by the exercise of her influence given a commission in the army.

It must be remembered that Gwyn was a common name, and that there were, of course, many bearing it who were entirely unconnected with Nell, as, for instance, Francis Gwynne, who, mentioned in the entry of the expenses of her funeral, was a politician of some distinction and was sometime Clerk of the Council.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CHILDHOOD OF NELL GWYN

Nell Gwyn uneducated.—An imaginative account of her early years.—Serves as a maid in an infamous establishment.—Mother Ross.—Nell Gwyn said to have sold herrings, and to have sung in taverns.—Etherege's lampoon: "The Lady of Pleasure."—Her first love.—Lewknor Lane, Drury Lane.—She becomes an orange-girl at Drury Lane Theatre.—The "Mother of the Maids."—"Orange Moll."—Samuel Pepys and Mrs. Knipp.—The morals of the orange-girls.

**W**HETHER it is accepted that Mrs. Gwyn was a drunken sot when Nell was a child, or whether she was then (which certainly seems unlikely) earning her living in a reputable way, there seems no doubt whatever that the family was in a very humble condition. Certainly it had no money to provide for the girls even the elementary education of those days. Nell Gwyn was entirely unschooled. It may be that she could read with difficulty, but to the end of her days she could do little more than scrawl her initials. In a letter from Sir Robert Howard to the Duke of Ormond, written in 1679, when Nell was twenty-eight, he says, "She presents you with her real acknowledgments for all your favours, and protests she would write in her own hand, but her wild characters would distract you."

The only mention of Nell Gwyn's father is to be found in the anonymous "Memoirs" of 1752—a catchpenny

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## The Childhood of Nell Gwyn

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biography which probably does not contain a single statement worthy of credence. Still, this warning having been uttered, a quotation from the book may be given as a curiosity :

“ Eleanor Gwinn was the daughter of a tradesman in mean circumstances, who could afford to bestow but a slender education upon her, but who took care to introduce her into as good company as possible and early implant in her mind a great sense of virtue and delicacy, the former of which she was not long in parting with, without the misfortune of losing the latter.

“ She no sooner became conscious of her own charms than she solicited her father to permit her to go into the world under the protection of a lady, where she imagined that her beauty would soon raise admirers, and by having an opportunity of a more unrestrained and free behaviour, she was not without hopes of making her fortune at the expense of some amorous visitor of that lady in whose house she was to live as an upper servant.”

According to this same “ authority,” Nell Gwyn attracted the attention of a man in whom the mistress of the house was interested, and she was summarily dismissed—at this time, it must be remarked, Nell may have been as much as twelve years of age.

“ The conduct of the lady shows what cruel injustice they, who are rivals, are capable of inflicting on one another ; for the obscurity of Nell’s birth and the

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## Nell Gwyn

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indigence of circumstances could not protect her from this lady's persecution, who saw no flaw in it but her beauty.

"Her father was obstinate, and threatened to abandon Nell for ever if she did not consent to go into Yorkshire and live with her aunt, who was the wife of a parish clerk, and a woman who, as she had never seen London, was not likely to fill her head with vanity or teach her anything but country economy.

"Nell heard this proposal with ineffable contempt; she'd seen enough of life to make her fond of town, and though she was in full possession of her virtue, she began to entertain some thoughts of yielding it, rather than be sent to the country to live in obscurity and contract rustic habits, by which she could lose all power of pleasing for ever."

It would be interesting to hear more about the "good company" to which her father introduced Nell, but as regards that we must be content to remain ignorant. We are more fortunate, from the biographical point of view, in being able to make a fairly shrewd guess as to the identity of the lady in whose house she was to live as an upper servant—the "upper servant," however, we may dismiss as a figment of the imagination of an eighteenth-century author of this kind of book who, speaking of a King's mistress, could not bring himself to write of anything more menial.

Nell, however, whatever her faults, had no false pride, and we have her own account of this in Pepys' "Diary." "Mrs. Pierce tells me that the two Mar-

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## The Childhood of Nell Gwyn

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shalls at the King's House are Stephen Marshall's, the great Presbyterian's daughters ; and that Nelly and Beck Marshall falling out the other day, the latter called the other my Lord Buckhurst's mistress. Nell answered her : ' I was but one man's mistress, though I was brought up in a brothel to fill strong water to the gentlemen ; and you are a mistress to three or four, though a Presbyterian's praying daughter.' " It has been conclusively proved that Ann and Rebecca Marshall were not the children of the eminent preacher ; but the rest of the story is true, and this, as Cunningham naïvely puts it, " for a girl of any virtue or beauty was indeed a bad bringing up."

The keeper of the brothel, Nell's first employer, was the infamous Mother Ross. These places had been placed under very definite restrictions so early as the reign of Henry II., when it was ordained that they must bear distinctive marks, that no inmate should be detained, that no nun or married woman should be harboured, or any one suffering from any contagious disease ; that no man might be entrapped or allured thereto, etc., and that all stews were subject to inspection once a week by responsible authorities.

This Mother Ross, by the way, must not be confused with that Christian Cavanagh, *alias* Mother Ross, who was born in 1667 and died 1739, and concealing her sex served as a private in the Royal Inniskillen Regiment, and married three times, and whose " Life and Adventures " have been attributed to the pen of Defoe.

As Nell Gwyn made her appearance on the stage

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## Nell Gwyn

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when she was fourteen, it is probable that her own account, as given by Pepys, is near enough, and that she was employed as a waitress or housemaid; but it would be a bold person who would say that this pretty, saucy child did not, in the circumstances, serve Mother Ross's patrons in other ways, her extreme youth notwithstanding.

Anyhow, what is certain, that before she became an actress she had certainly been seduced—if, indeed, it can be called seduction, her mother leading a dissolute life and, no doubt, having prepared her daughter to follow in her footsteps.

Lord Rochester, than whom a more vindictive man never wrote excellent verse, in his lines addressed "To Mistress Nelly, grown from Cinder Nell," gave his version of her beginnings :

"Of thy Anointed Princess, Madam Nelly,  
Whose first employment with open throat,  
To cry fresh herrings, even ten a Groat."

In this capacity of herring-seller, it is suggested that Nell had to go from tavern to tavern, and that after dinner or supper she sang to the company in these places—what sort of songs may be imagined. This, of course, is pure conjecture, but the experience of facing an audience that she obtained in this way might explain her early success on the stage.

Rochester continues :

"Then was by Madam Ross expos'd to Town,—  
I mean to those who would give her half-a-crown :  
Next in the Play-House she took her degree,  
As men commence at th' University."

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## The Childhood of Nell Gwyn

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Other glimpses of Nell Gwyn are given in Etherege's lampoons. In "The Lady of Pleasure : a Satyr," he states his Argument :

" The Life of Nelly truly flown,  
From Cole-yard, and Celler, to the Throne,  
Till into the Grave she tumbled down,"

and then proceeds :

" I sing the song of a Scoundrel Lass,  
Rais'd from Dunghill, to a King's Embrace :  
I trace her from her Birth and Infant Years ;  
To *Venus* none so like as she appears :  
To Madam *Venus* the Sea-froth gave Birth ;  
To Madam *Nell*, the Scum of all the Earth ;  
No Man alive could ever call her daughter,  
For a Battalion of Arm'd Men begot her.

. . . . .  
" Fam'd be the Celler then, wherein the Babe  
Was first brought forth to be a Monarch's Drab.

. . . . .  
" He that hath seen her mudling in the Street,  
Her face all Pot-lid black, unshod her Feet,  
And in a Cloud of Dust her Cinders shaking,  
Could he have thought her fit for Monarch's taking ?  
Even then she had her Charms of brisk and witty."

In connection with the above allusion to Nell Gwyn's unshod feet, there is a really pretty, though possibly apocryphal incident, which is taken from a manuscript note in an interleaved copy of Downes' "Roscius Anglicanus," which gives an account of something Basil Montagu had read of her when a child :

" ' My first love, you must know, was a link-boy.'  
" ' A what ? ' ,

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## Nell Gwyn

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“ ‘Tis true,’ said she, ‘for all the frightfulness of your *what* ; and a very good sort he was, poor Dick ; and had the heart of a gentleman. God knows what has become of him ; but when I last saw him, he said he would humbly love me to his dying day. He used to say I must have been a Lord’s daughter for my beauty, and that I ought to ride in my coach, and behaved to me as if I did. He, poor boy, would light me and my mother home, when we had sold our oranges, to our lodgings in Lawkenor’s Lane, as if we had been ladies of the land. He said he never felt easy for the evening ’till he had asked me how I did ; then he went gaily about his work, and if he saw us housed at night he slept like a prince. I shall never forget when he came flushing and stammering, and drew out of his pocket a pair of worsted stockings which he brought for my naked feet. It was bitter cold weather and I had chilblains which made me hobble about till I cried ; and what does poor Richard do but work hard like a horse and buy me these worsted stockings. My mother bade him put them on ; and so he did, and his warm tears fell on my chilblains, and he said he should be the happiest Lord on earth if the stockings did me any good.’ ”

It is obvious that there was nothing for a girl in Nell Gwyn’s position and with her looks and nature but, as one of the characters in a play by Mr. Shaw puts it, to be kind to some man or men who could afford to be good to her. The amiable author of the biography of 1752 is divided between his desire to show her as clinging to virtue and as prepared to

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## The Childhood of Nell Gwyn

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give herself for a sufficient reward. According to him she repulsed a would-be lover who gave her ten guineas for her favours—that is to say, she kept the guineas and gave him nothing in return—even when she was at Mother Ross's ; but, leaving her home, she took a "private lodging," and went often to the play, having now some hankering for the stage.

"She had observed how gaily many ladies lived, who had no other means of supporting their grandeur but by making such concessions to men of fortune, and stipulating such terms as both of them could well afford to comply with. And as she was sensible that many succeeded upon the Town with half her accomplishments, she began to despise all thoughts of going into the country, and told her father that he might abandon her, if he pleased, but she was never to abandon the town.

"In this dilemma she cast her eyes upon the stage, and as her person was admirably calculated to inspire passion, she imagined if she was arrayed in the pomp of tragedy heroines, her figure alone, without any theatrical requisites, would make her pass upon the Town ; or, at least, if she could not wear the buskin with success, she could see no objection to her appearing as a Lady-in-waiting or one of the Maids-of-the-Bedchamber to the Queen of the Stage.

"This thought filled her with rapture ; lovers, fame, pleasure and gallantry crowded on her fancy ; she soon became a queen in imagination, though she never once dreamed of becoming in reality, if not a queen, at least the mistress of a monarch, and being

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## Nell Gwyn

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filled with that kind of royalty, which is more substantial than a two hours' glitter on the stage.

"After living a month or two in this manner, she wrote a letter to Mr. Betterton, inviting him to her lodgings, to whom she disclosed the scheme of coming on the stage, and desired he might give his opinion of her powers in recitation. He told her plainly, that she was not then fit for the stage, though she seemed to have a genius that was, and advised her to prosecute some other scheme of liveliness. Unlucky for Miss Gwynn, Mr. Betterton was not amorous, or at least, conceived no passion for her, for she was in hopes of operating upon the manager by her face and person, as well as her voice and action."

Things must indeed have been different then if a little girl sent for managers of theatres to call on her, and the managers came to see if she had the necessary qualities to become an actress. What is more likely—it is, in fact, practically certain—is that while still in the house of the infamous brothel-keeper, Nell Gwyn was promoted to being allowed to go into the notorious Lewknor's Lane (on the east side of Drury Lane, opposite Short's Gardens, and now renamed Macklin Street), where, we are informed, that in her day "young creatures were inveigled into infamy, and sent dressed as orange-girls to sell fruit and attract attention in the adjoining theatres."

Lewknor's Lane, so called after Sir Lewis Lewknor, who was Master of the Ceremonies at the Court of James I., had a most unenviable reputation. In the days of the Stuarts it was not only a rendezvous

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## The Childhood of Nell Gwyn

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for loose women, but a nursery in which young girls were trained for the brothels. In Dryden's play, *The Wild Gallant*, which was produced in 1663, the old procuress, who masquerades as Lady Du Lake, tells the heroine that her "lodgings are in St. Lucknor's Lane, at the Cat and Fiddle," and Butler makes allusion to it :

" The nymphs of chaste Diana's train,  
The same with those of Lewknor's Lane."

There is a better known reference to it in *The Beggar's Opera*, where the Drawer says : " I expect him back every minute. But you know, Sir, you sent him as far as Hockley-in-the-Hole for three of the ladies, for one in Vinegar Yard, and for the rest of them somewhere about Lewknor's Lane."

The orange-girls were an institution at the theatre. One of them was made responsible to the management, not for the morality of the rest, but for discipline—in that respect occupying, according to Peter Cunningham, the same sort of office at the theatre as the " Mother of the Maids " occupied at Court among the Maids of Honour.

In Nell Gwyn's day this young woman was known as " Orange Moll." Her task must have indeed been onerous, but it appears she found time to talk to the gallants and also to act as a go-between for actresses and their admirers. In Dennis's play, *Plot and No Plot*, one of the characters is made to say :

" If this is the play-house, give me but thy billet,  
And the orange-wench shall deliver it immediately to her."

An instance of Orange Moll's activities in this

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direction is given by Pepys in his Diary for August 22, 1667, when he was attending at the King's House a performance of *The Indian Emperor*. "But what," he writes, "that troubled me most was, that Knipp sent by Moll to desire to speak to me after the play; and she beckoned to me at the end of the play, and I promised to come; but it was so late, and I forced to step to Mrs. William's lodgings with my Lord Bruncker and her, where I did not stay, however, for fear of her shewing her closet, and thereby forcing me to give her something; and it was so late, that for fear of my wife's coming home before, I was forced to go straight home, which troubled me."

The orange-girls for the most part were, as a matter of fact, neither more or less than prostitutes, and were so regarded by men about town, who talked to them without reticence, while they on their side were not shy about plying their trade. "She outdoes a play-house orange-woman for the politick management of a bawdy intrigue," is a line in the anonymous comedy, *Tunbridge Wells*, printed in 1676. But as regards the sale of oranges, anyhow, there was no attempt at extortion.

"Half-crown my play, sixpence my orange cost," is given as the price in the prologue to Mrs. Aphra Behn's *Young King*. It was apparently etiquette for the *beaux* to buy oranges at the price asked for them, and then "to present the fairest to the next vizard mask"—masks being then the distinguishing badge of the courtesan. Pepys has recorded how once he was "done." "So into the play again," he

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wrote on May 11th, 1668. "But there happened one thing which vexed me which is that the orange-woman did come in the pit and challenge me for twelve oranges which she delivered by my order at the late play, at night to give some ladies in a box which was wholly untrue, but she swore it to be true. But however, I did deny it and did not pay her ; but for quiet, did buy 4s. worth of oranges of her at 6d. a piece."

Nell Gwyn, though then about thirteen, was no doubt an attractive figure, and according to the "Memoirs" she attracted the attention of Betterton, who, remembering having seen her, bethought him of her ambition to become a player :

"He advised her to continue her manner of life for some time, and appointed one of his subalterns to pay her frequent visits and initiate her in the principle of playing. This subaltern was himself a promising genius, he had made a rapid progress on the stage, and was held in esteem, not only for his present accomplishments, but for the attainments he was likely soon to be master of. He was of a constitution sanguine and amorous ; he felt the passion he represented ; and as love is inseparable from a heart capable of tender sensations, so it is not to be doubted but he made some advances to Nell and some proposals with which, if she complied, she would have an opportunity of relishing those overwhelming transports which poets have displayed with such lavish descriptions and players have uttered in all the ecstasy of fainting lovers."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STAGE AFTER THE RESTORATION

Nell Gwyn's first lovers.—Rochester's mention of them.—"Rowley."—"A Cully of the City."—Durgan, Dongan or Duncan.—Charles Hart, the actor.—John Lacy, the dramatist and comedian.—The morals of the Restoration stage.—The first women players.—Their shameless conduct.—Pepys's impression of them.—Pepys and Mrs. Knipp.—Evelyn's condemnation of the rampant immorality.—Nell Gwyn's indifference to her reputation.

**N**ELL GWYN'S career may be said to have begun when she was promoted from Lewknor Lane to the proud position of orange-girl at Drury Lane Theatre. Here her good looks early attracted attention, and, if she had not been seduced before, which is more than probable, her undoing was certainly not long after in coming.

Rochester, in his "Panegyrick to Nelly," has written :

"The Orange-Basket her fair Arm did suit,  
Laden with Pippins and Hesperian Fruit,  
This first Step rais'd, to the wond'ring Pit she sold  
The lovely Fruit smiling with Streaks of Gold.  
Fate now for her did its whole Force engage,  
And from the Pit she's mounted to the Stage :  
There in full lustre did her Glories shine,  
And, long eclips'd, spread forth their Light divine :  
There Hart's and Rowley's soul she did inflame,  
And made a King a rival to a Player."

In this age of nicknames the King himself did not escape. He was called "Old Rowley." According

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to one account this was in allusion to an ill-favoured but famous horse in the royal mews ; according to another account : " There was an old goat that used to roam about the privy-garden to which they had given this name ; a rank, lecherous devil that everyone knew and used to stroke, because he was good-humoured and familiar ; and so they applied this name to Charles." Charles knew of his nickname and did not mind it in the least. It is recorded by Granger that as he was passing the apartments of a Mrs. Howard, who was a maid of honour to the Duchess of York, he heard her singing a ballad of the day, " Old Rowley the King," and, thereupon, knocked at the door. The lady called out, " Who is that ? " to which he answered, laughing : " Old Rowley himself, Madam."

Who was Nell Gwyn's first love has been a matter of amiable controversy—a controversy that will now, of course, never be settled. Those put forth by various champions for the honour are " a Cully of the City ; " one Durgan, Dongan or Duncan, who may or may not have been the citizen ; Charles Hart the actor ; and John Lacy, dramatist and comedian.

According to Etherege, " her charms of brisk and witty " first inflamed " a Cully of the City," which had her cleaned and furbished " that she might be his darling and delight : "

" Then in her Wine began this Dialogue.

' My little Dirty, my pretty Rogue,

Thou hast redeem'd me from my fitten Milk,

To Worsted Hose, and Petticoat of Silk.

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Be Kind, my dear, and flowing Joy impart,  
Apply Love's Sovereign Balsaam to my Heart.'  
Then for some time each other they enjoy'd  
Until the Merchant, not the Girl, was cloy'd ;  
For either with the Expense of Purse or Love  
At length the Fool did wondrous *Nell*-sick prove."

However, apparently the "Cully of the City" was not a bad fellow, or heartless, and determined to provide for her future, though not at his own expense :

"How're he would not leave her as he found her,  
That had been base, since he had got the Plunder,  
Besides, he knew that she had both Wit and Sence,  
Beauty, and such a stock of Impudence  
As to the Play-house well might recommend her,  
And therefore thither was resolv'd to send her."

There is mention of this protector of Nell Gwyn in Oldys' account of her :

"One Mr. Duncan, a merchant, taking a fancy to her smart wit, fine shape, and foot, the least of any woman's in England, kept her about two years, then recommended her into the King's Play-house."

If the tale be true—and some such thing must in all probability have happened—and if the merchant kept her for two years before she went on the stage, she must have lived with him as his mistress from the age of twelve to fourteen—a less uncommon thing then than now.

Who this Duncan was has not definitely been agreed. What Oldys says is confirmed to some extent by Sir George Etherege in "Madam Nelly's Complaint,"

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where he supplies the information that in after years she procured him a commission in the Guards. It is difficult not to believe that there must be some confusion here, it being extremely unlikely that the merchant, who, when Nell Gwyn became Charles's mistress and so could expect her influence, could no longer have been a lad, would have become a subaltern, or, indeed, have wanted to become a subaltern, in the Household Brigade.

Peter Cunningham was at great pains to sift this matter. He came to the conclusion that Oldys was wrong in his statement that Duncan was a merchant ; and that the Duncan mentioned by Etherege in the satire on Nell was the Dongan described in De Grammont's memoirs as a gentleman of merit who succeeded Duras, afterwards Earl of Faversham, in the post of Lieutenant in the Duke's Life Guards.

It is beyond question that there was a lieutenant of the name of Robert Dongan in the Duke's Life Guards, who was a cadet of the house of Limerick, but the researches of Mr. Gordon Goodwin have established the fact that this Dongan was not the first protector of Nell Gwyn. The Robert Dongan of Count Grammont died in 1662, when Nell was a girl of eleven, and he did not succeed, but was succeeded by Louis de Duras, Marquis of Blanquefort, and afterwards Earl of Faversham. The question, however, is of purely academic interest, and need not be pursued.

It is generally accepted by writers on Nell Gwyn that her first theatrical protector was Hart or Lacy,

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and the preference is by more or less common consent given to the former, who was apparently "a broth of a boy," though when he first met Nell he must have been about forty.

Charles Hart went on the stage at an early age—the exact date of his birth is not known—making his first appearance in women's parts, and playing the Duchess in Shirley's *The Cardinal*, which play was licensed in 1641, though not printed until twenty years later. At the outbreak of the Civil War he served in Prince Rupert's regiment of horse; during the Commonwealth, when the theatres were closed, he took part in dramatic performances at Holland House and other private residences; and at the Restoration he joined the company at the Vere Street Theatre. In 1663 he went with Killigrew to the King's House, where he remained until the junction of the two companies in 1682, a year before his death. He was not only a creditable actor—he played with success such parts as Othello, Brutus in *Julius Cæsar*, and Alexander—but he was evidently a very personable fellow and a great deal of a gallant.

John Lacy, who must have been some ten or more years older than Hart, was also one of the principal actors in the King's company, and was, it has been put on record, "of a rare shape of body and good complexion." He made his mark as a comedian. He got into disgrace in 1667 when, playing in *Change of Crowns*, he, as Pepys puts it, "did act the Country Gentleman come up to Court, who do abuse the Court with all imaginable wit and plainness about selling of

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places and doing everything for money," for Charles II., who was present at the performance, was so angry at being abused to his face that he ordered the theatre to be closed and Lacy to be committed to the Porter's Lodge. Forgiveness, owing to the intercession of Killigrew, followed soon upon the punishment. Lacy, who was of a literary turn of mind, wrote several comedies and farces, which had some success in their day, but have not survived.

Etherege supports the view that both Hart and Lacy were Nell Gwyn's lovers, after (as he thinks) the merchant introduced her to the stage :

" Where soon she grew being in her proper Sphere  
The Pride and Envy of the Theater :  
Then entered *Nelly* on the publick stage,  
Harlot of harlots, *Lais* of the age."

Colley Cibber, however, says that "Hart introduced Mrs. Gwyn upon the dramatic boards, and has acquired the distinction of being ranked among that lady's first felicitous lovers, by having succeeded to Lacy in the possession of her charms. Nell had been tutored for the stage by these admirers in conjunction, testifying her gratitude to both.

At the time Nell Gwyn went on the stage it was, from the moralist's point of view, in a deplorable state. This is not the place to write of the Restoration dramatists, and it suffices to say that they gave themselves every possible latitude in the way of impropriety of language and situation.

When the theatres were reopened after the return of Charles to England, and women for the first time

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appeared on the stage, the theatre attracted all the gay young men about town and a good many old ones too.

The actresses were chosen for their looks, their figures (the charms of which were not hidden), their impudence, and their lack of morals. "The additional objects then of really beautiful women could not but draw a proportion of new admirers to the theatre," Colley Cibber wrote in his "Apology." "We may imagine, too, that these actresses were not ill-chosen, when it is well known that more than one had charms sufficient at their leisure hours to calm and mollify the cares of Empire."

There was, indeed, no doubt whatever about the morality of the women players on the London stage, nor, in fact, was there any desire on their part that there should be. Their lack of virtue was a great part of their stock in trade. They were all openly and avowedly either kept women, or women of the town available for every comer with enough in his purse to make it worth their while, and their fidelity to their lovers was about on a par with that of the loyalty of the barn-door fowl.

They were out for what they considered a merry life, and, that being conceded, they did not mind if it was a short one. Anyhow, lived they beyond the allotted span of life, their period of a good time coincided precisely with the endurance of their good looks and attractive figures.

It would be hard to blame them, partly because of the times in which they lived, when licentiousness was

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## The Stage after the Restoration

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rampant, and for the rest if they had looked on virtue they had known it not. They came for the most part from the stews, where they were exploited almost in childhood by the brothel-keepers, and, no doubt, more than one, when no longer charming, in her later days returned to the stews as a procuress.

They were shiftless and thriftless; they passed from hand to hand, with never a thought for the future, and as a rule Fate avenged herself on them for their disrespect of her. Only here and there, one, like Nell Gwyn, exceptionally charming, escaped the common lot—and even Nell, dying at thirty-seven, may have cheated the future of what it held for her—though, in her case, she gave hostages to fortune in the person of her ennobled son.

The following passages from Pepys's "Diary" give a better impression of what the theatre was then like than pages of description :

"October 5, 1667.—And so to the King's House : and there, going in, met with Knipp, and she took us up into the tireing rooms : and to the women's shift, where Nell was dressing herself, and was all unready, and is very pretty, prettier than I thought.

"And so walked all up and down the house above, and then below into the scene-room, and there sat down, and she gave us fruit : and here read the questions to Knipp, while she answered me, through all her part of *Flora's Vagaries*\* which was acted to-day.

\* A comedy written by Richard Rhodes when a student at Oxford. It was first acted at Christ Church on January 8, 1663, and in London on the following November 3.

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But Lord ! to see how they were both painted would make a man mad and did make me loathe them ; and what base company of men comes among them, and how lewdly they talk ! and how poor the men are in clothes, and yet what a shew they make on the stage by candle-light, is very observable.

“ But to see how Nelly cursed for having so few people in the pit, was very pretty ; the other house carrying away all the people at the new play, and is said now-a-days to have generally most company, as being better players.

“ By and by into the pit, and there saw the play, which is pretty good, but my belly was full of what I had seen in the house, and so, after the play done away home, and there to the writing my letters, and so home to supper and to bed.

“ *April 7, 1668.*—After the play done, I down to Knipp and did stay her undressing herself ; and there saw the several players men and women go by ; and pretty to see how strange they are all, one to another after the play is done.

“ Here I saw a wonderful pretty maid of her own, that comes to undress her, and one so pretty that she says she intends not to keep her for fear of her being undone in her service, by coming to the playhouse.

“ The eldest Davenport\* is, it seems, gone from this house to be kept by somebody ; which I am glad of, she being a very bad actor.

\* Frances, the eldest sister of Elizabeth Davenport, the famous Roxalana.



"And to the women's shift where Nell was dressing herself  
and was all unready, and is very pretty, prettier than  
I thought



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"I took her [Mrs. Knipp] then up into a coach and away to the Park, which is now very fine after some rain, but the company was going away most, and so I took her to the Lodge, and there treated her and had a good deal of talk, and now and then did *baiser la*, and that was all, and that is much or more than I had much mind to because of her paint.

"She tells me mighty news, that my lady Castlemaine is mightily in love with Hart of their house : and he is much with her in private and she goes to him ; and do give him many presents ; and that the thing is most certain, and Becke Marshall only privy to it, and the means of bringing them together, which is a very odd thing ; and by this means she is even with the King's love to Mrs. Davis."

"*May 7, 1668.*—Thence called Knipp from the King's House, where going in for her, the play being done, I did see Beck Marshall come dressed, off the stage, and looks mighty fine, and pretty and noble : and also Nell in her boy's clothes, mighty pretty.

"But Lord ! their confidence ! and how many men do hover about them as soon as they come off the stage, and how confident they are in their talk !

"Here I did kiss the pretty woman newly come, called Peg, that was Sir Charles Sedley's mistress, a mighty pretty woman, and seems, but is not, modest."

Pepys himself, however, was not exempt from the frailty of other well-placed frequenters of the playhouse. Mrs. Knipp certainly attracted him, and he her,

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more than was meet, even though the relations between them may not, perhaps, have been as intimate as is usually alleged.

For instance, there is an entry in his "Diary" :

"*January 7, 1666.*—(Lord's Day). In the evening before I went, comes Mrs. Knipp, just to speak with me privately, to excuse her not coming to me yesterday, complaining how like a devil her husband treats her, and so I kissed her and parted."

Again, two days later he writes :

"So home, and find all my good company I had bespoke, as Coleman and his wife, and Laneare, Knipp and her surly husband."

There seems, from the following passage and others similar to it, to have been—or would be in these days—some excuse for the "surly husband."

"*January 6, 1666.*—Thence with Lord Brouncker to Greenwich by water to a great dinner and much company : Mr. Cottle and his lady and others and I went, hoping to get Mrs. Knipp to us, having wrote a letter to her in the morning, calling myself 'Dapper Dicky' in answer to hers of 'Barbary Allen,'\* but could not, and am told by the boy that carried my letter, that he found her crying ; but I fear she leads a sad life with that ill-natured fellow her husband ; so we had a great, but a melancholy dinner, having not her there, as I hoped.

\* "*Barbary Allen*" was a popular song of the day.



Mr and Mrs Pepys and Mrs. Knipp.



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“ After dinner to cards, and then comes notice that my wife is come unexpectedly to me to town. So I to her. It is only to see what I do, and why I come not home ; and she is in the right that I would have a little more of Mrs. Knipp’s company before I go away.”

The extracts concerning Pepys and Mrs. Knipp could be multiplied largely, but only one more shall be given :

“ *July 6, 1666.*—Being at home, I there met with a letter from Bab. Allen, to invite me to be godfather to her boy.”

The gallants took their mistresses from the stage, and mostly the ladies, if not indeed all, distributed their favours generously, and, often, indiscriminately—in return for a consideration. This, to the great distress of Evelyn, who, in his “ *Diary* ” on October 18, 1666, wrote :

“ This night was acted My Lord Broghill’s tragedy, called *Mustapha*, before their Majesties at Court, at which I was present, very seldom going to the public Theatres for many reasons, now as they were abused to an atheistical liberty, fowle and indecent women now, and never till now, permitted to appear and act, who inflaming several young noblemen and gallants, became their misses and to some their wives : witness the Earl of Oxford, Sir R. Howard, P[rincc] Rupert, the Earl of Dorset, and another greater person than

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## Nell Gwyn

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any of them, who fell into their snares, to the reproach of their noble families and ruin of both body and soul. I was invited by my Lord Chamberlain to see this tragedy exceeding well written : though in my own mind I did not approve of any such pastime in a season of such judgments and calamities."

The lesser folk, who could not hope to attract the attention or arouse the cupidity of the actresses, were in no doubt as to their character, and occasionally gave expression to their views in no uncertain way. Nell Gwyn herself was indifferent to such abuse, alike when she was simply a saucy baggage at the beginning of her theatrical career as when she was the King's mistress.

There is a story told that she, seeing her coachman fighting another man, inquired the cause of the quarrel, and received the blunt reply, "Because he called you a whore." To this she replied, according to one version, "Go to, you blockhead. Never fight again in such a cause, nor risk your carcase but in the defence of truth." We may well doubt the language, but the sentiment expressed was certainly the sentiment of Nell Gwyn. Servants were really attached to their masters and mistresses in those days, and were prepared to fight even to the death, for their qualities, if not always their morality. In the Rutland manuscript at Belvoir there has been preserved a letter, dated June 20, 1670, from Lady Chaworth to her brother, Lord Ross, in which she relates the following incident : "One of the K[ing's] servants has killed

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## The Stage after the Restoration

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Mr. Hues, Peg Hues' brother, servant to P[rince] Rupert upon a dispute whether Miss Nelly or she was the handsomer now at Windsor."

Nell Gwyn was clearly not alone in her indifference to her reputation.

## CHAPTER V

### SOME STAGE FOLK OF THE DAY

Edward Kynaston.—William Mountford.—Mrs. Bracegirdle.—Congreve's admiration for her.—Elizabeth Davenport.—Her mock marriage with the Earl of Oxford.—Elizabeth Barry.—Peg Hughes.—Sarah Cooke.—Moll Knight.—Hildebrand Horden.

**N**O woman appeared upon the English stage until after the Restoration. Theretofore, every female character had been undertaken by a male—in fact, Colley Cibber cites an amusing instance, towards the close of 1660, of Charles II. attending the theatre while the old *régime* still obtained.

“The King,” he says, “coming a little before his usual time to a Tragedy, found the actors not ready to begin, when his Majesty not chusing to have as much patience as his good subjects, sent to know the meaning of it ; upon which the master of the company came to the Box, and rightly judging that the best excuse for their default would be the true one, fairly told His Majesty that the Queen was not *shaved* yet. The King, whose humour lov’d to laugh at a jest as well as to make one, accepted the excuse, which served to divert him until the male Queen could be effeminated. In a word, Kynaston at that time was so beautiful a youth that the ladies of quality prided themselves

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## Some Stage Folk of the Day

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n taking him with them in their coaches to Hyde Park in his theatrical habit, after the Play ; which in those days they might have sufficient time to do, because plays then were used to begin at four o'clock."

This same Kynaston appeared as Epicoene in *The Silent Woman* on January 7, 1661. But it is almost certain that the first woman appeared "on any stage" after the Restoration on December 8, 1660, though her name has not been preserved. The piece was by Thomas Jordan, and was "A Prologue" to introduce the first woman that came upon the stage to act, in the tragedy, *The Moor of Venice*.

When Pepys saw *The Beggar's Bush* at Killigrew's playhouse on November 20, 1660, all the parts were played by males ; but on the following January 3, when he again saw the same play at the same theatre, he noted this as "the first time that ever I saw women come upon the stage."

Edward Kynaston made his first appearance at the Cockpit in Drury Lane in 1659, and he did not retire until 1699, eight years before his death. "He stayed too long upon the stage, till his memory and spirit began to fail him," Colley Cibber mentions ; but he was for a generation an idol of the rank and fashion that frequented the theatre. Pepys was an enthusiastic admirer of Kynaston's acting and personality, and characterized him as alike "the loveliest lady for a boy" and the "handsomest man" on the Restoration stage.

At one time Kynaston appears to have had a mania for mimicking Sir Charles Sedley, one of the fashionable

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## Nell Gwyn

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"bloods" of the day. This was not, at first, in the theatre, but in the streets and public resorts, and Sir Charles hired a man to thrash the actor in the Park. Nothing daunted, Kynaston in 1669 then imitated the baronet on the stage, and for this temerity he was so soundly thrashed that he was unable to appear at the theatre for a week.

Kynaston, owing to his long theatrical career, was thus a stage-contemporary of the ill-fated William Mountford, who to some extent replaced him in the affections of the playgoers. Mountford was by all accounts one of the most natural and versatile players of his period. Two of his most memorable impersonations were as Sir Courtly in Crowne's *Sir Courtly Nice*, and the title-rôle in Mrs. Behn's *The Rover*. His tragic death took place when he was in his thirty-third year and at the height of his powers. The notorious Charles, Lord Mohun, had agreed to "assist" Captain Richard Hill in abducting the beautiful Mrs. Bracegirdle. It happened that Mountford lived in the same street (Howard Street, Strand) as that celebrated actress, who, while struggling with her would-be abductor, heard Hill uttering violent threats against Mountford. She managed to send a warning to the latter, who, appearing on the scene, received a fatal wound from Hill before he had time to draw his own weapon. The murderer fled the country. Mohun, who was tried by his peers, was acquitted by a majority and survived till 1712, when he and the Duke of Hamilton slaughtered each other—there is no other term for it—in a duel in Hyde Park.

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## Some Stage Folk of the Day

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Mountford was buried in St. Clement Danes, Strand—his pretty and gifted widow, a comedian of real talent, married the actor Verbruggen. It is told of the latter, after his marriage to Mrs. Mountford, that his favourite saying was : “ D—— me ! though I don’t value my wife much, yet nobody shall affront her.”

Mrs. Bracegirdle may be regarded as having taken up the theatrical mantle of popularity that Nell Gwyn had abandoned. In that age she was remarkable for her virtue, or, as the author of “ Their Majesties’ Servants ” phrases it, “ she was exposed to sarcasm only on account of her excellent private character. Platonic friendships she *did* cultivate and with those slander dealt severely enough.” Dr. Doran continues : “ The most singular testimony ever rendered to this virtue occurred on the occasion when Dorset, Devonshire, Halifax, and other peers were making of that virtue a subject of eulogy after a bottle of wine. Halifax remarked that they might do something better than praise her ; and thereupon he put down two hundred guineas, which the contributors of the company raised to eight hundred guineas—and this sum was presented to the lady as a homage to the rectitude of her private character. Whether she accepted this tribute I do not know ; but I know that she declined another from Lord Burlington, who had long loved her in vain. ‘ One day,’ says Walpole, ‘ he sent her a present of some fine old china. She told the servant he had made a mistake ; that it was true the letter was for her, but the china for his lady,

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to whom he must carry it. Lord! the Countess was so full of gratitude when her husband came home to dinner."

Congreve wrote for Mrs. Bracegirdle, Millamart in *The Way of the World*, Cynthia, Araminta, Almeria and Angelica. For him the actress undoubtedly cherished one of her platonic affections, and at one time it was rumoured that they were going to marry. Of this rumour Congreve himself, "perhaps not in the best of taste," wrote as follows :

" Pious Belinda goes to prayers  
Whenever I ask a favour.  
Yet the tender fool's in tears  
When she thinks I'd leave her.  
Would I were free from this restraint,  
Or else had power to win her ;  
Would she could make of me a saint,  
Or I of her a sinner."

By way of contrast to the virtue of Mrs. Bracegirdle there is the story of Aubrey de Vere, 20th Earl of Oxford, who went through a mock marriage with a member of the company at the Duke's House. The identity of the girl has not been definitely fixed, but the best authorities presume her to have been Elizabeth Davenport, who played Roxolana in Lee's *The Rival Queens*. It is generally agreed that she was most abominably treated, even taking the licentiousness of the age into consideration. "The Earl of Oxford," so runs an account by Miss Hobart, "came to her lodgings attended by a clergyman and another man for a witness. The marriage was accordingly solemn-

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## Some Stage Folk of the Day

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nized with all due ceremonies, in the presence of one of her fellow players who attended as a witness on her part. When examination was made concerning the marriage, it was found to be a mere deception. It appeared that the pretended priest was one of my lord's trumpeters, and the witness his kettle-drummer. . . . In vain did she throw herself at the King's feet and demand justice : she had only to rise up again without redress ; and happy might she think herself to receive an annuity of 1,000 crowns, and to resume the name of Roxolana instead of Countess of Oxford." A son of this union was born on April 17, 1663. It may be mentioned that it was a daughter of this Earl of Oxford who married Nell Gwyn's elder son, Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans.

Of Mrs. Knipp and Moll Davis mention is made elsewhere ; but there were also other actresses of note or notoriety. There was Elizabeth Barry, the daughter of a Colonel Barry who lost his fortune through fighting for Charles I. against the Parliament, who was born in 1653. As a child she seems to have been adopted by Lady D'Avenant, through whose influence, while still in her teens, she found the theatre as her *métier*. According to Betterton, " what first recommended Mrs. Barry to the stage was her voice ; " but she shaped so badly in speaking dialogue that " several persons of wit and quality positively gave their opinion she never would be capable of any part of acting." But at this moment my Lord Rochester came on the scene. He lays a wager that within six months he will make her a finished and polished

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artist. There is no difficulty in believing that Rochester quickly "became intimately acquainted with her, but to the world he kept it private, especially from those he had argued about her. . . . It was thought that he never loved any person so sincerely as he did Mrs. Barry." It was in 1677 that he coached her into appearing in her first two important rôles, the gipsy in Mrs. Behn's *The Rover* and Queen Isabella in Lord Orrery's tragedy *Mustapha*. Not only this, but Rochester induced the King and the Duke and Duchess of York to attend the theatre at the debut of his protégée in *Mustapha*. The result was a veritable triumph for Mrs. Barry, who literally brought the house down by her delivery of the lines spoken by the widowed Queen to the hard-hearted Cardinal :

" My Lord, my sorrow seeks not your relief ;  
You are not fit to judge a mother's grief.  
You have no child for an untimely grave,  
Nor can you love what I desire to save."

Her acting especially delighted the Duchess of York, who not only showered favours upon "the Barry," but was gracious enough to say that her own elocution was improved by hearing the actress speak. This condescension was continued even after the Duchess became Queen, when she presented her own coronation robes to Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Boutel, an actress who usually impersonated "the young innocent lady whom all the heroes are mad in love with." Her part in *Alexander the Great* was that of Statira, who had to be stabbed by Roxana. On one occasion—

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## Some Stage Folk of the Day

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it was said that the two ladies had had a slight dispute about a veil—Roxana struck with such force that, "tho' the point of the dagger was blunted, it made way through Mrs. Boutel's stays, and entered about a quarter of an inch in the flesh." Although, in the play, Statira had to be murdered by Roxana, she did not die as a sequel to this onslaught. Not unnaturally, in that state of society, there were those anxious to suggest as a possible cause of quarrel a flirtation between Rochester and Mrs. Boutel.

The intrigue of "Rupert of the Rhine" (Charles II.'s cousin) with Peg Hughes of Drury Lane Theatre commenced in 1669. This lady's stage career started six years previously, and she was the first woman to play Desdemona. At the time of her meeting with Rupert she was appearing in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*. She was unquestionably an actress of distinction and a girl of beauty.

A daughter, "Rupertia," was born to Rupert and Peg in 1673. In 1676 his mistress returned to the stage, to the Duke of York's company. She survived until 1719.

Prince Rupert died in 1682, and the Verney MS. informs us that "some say he sent his Garter to the King, desiring Lord Burford (Neill Gwyn's son) might have it with his daughter by Peg Hughes, to which last two he has left all his jewels and personal estate and arrears due from His Majesty."

For Mrs. Hughes Prince Rupert purchased the Great or Crabtree House on the Thames near Fulham,

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## Nell Gwyn

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which had been the residence of that ardent royalist, Sir Nicholas Crispe. After her lover's death she sold it to one Timothy Lannoy, a wealthy London merchant. After having had several tenants, it became, in the last decade of the eighteenth century, the property of the Margrave of Anspack, whose wife made it famous with her private theatricals. In 1819 Caroline of Brunswick, the ill-fated consort of George IV., took up her residence there. Here came many deputations of sympathizers, who were ridiculed by Theodore Hook :

"Have you been to Brandenburg, Heigh, Ma'am, Ho, Ma'am ?  
You've been to Brandenburg, Ho ?  
—Oh, yes, I have been, Ma'am,  
To visit the Queen, Ma'am,  
With the rest of the gallanty show-show,  
With the rest of the gallanty show."

Caroline of Brunswick died in August, 1821, at Brandenburg House, and shortly after the site and contents were sold. The curious may like to know that the position of the house is now marked, as nearly as possible, by the Hammersmith Distillery.

It may here be noted that the famous "Ruperta" necklace, which Prince Rupert probably inherited from his mother, Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, and gave to Mrs. Hughes, was purchased from her by Nell Gwyn for the handsome sum of £4,520.

The Court was at Tunbridge Wells during part of 1665, and while there Lord Rochester made love to a cousin of one of the maids of honour.

This young woman is vaguely described as a Miss

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## Some Stage Folk of the Day

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Sarah, who had "some disposition for the stage." As a fact, she was Sarah Cooke, an actress of the King's House, who is mentioned by Dryden, and who spoke the prologue at the first performance of Rochester's *Valentinian* and a new prologue at its second performance. Indeed, "prologues and epilogues were her particular province." Miss Cooke possessed considerable charm, and one epigrammist of the time complimented Rochester on having introduced the prettiest and the worst actress in the kingdom.

The Mrs. Knight who is credited with having been both a beautiful singer and one of Charles II.'s "favourites" is now actually less remembered for her vocal triumphs than as having played the part of go-between when Charles desired to remove Nell Gwyn from the protection of Lord Buckhurst. It is, however, to her credit that she sang quite sweetly in sundry musical productions of the period. "Moll" Knight was "no less celebrated for her profane swearing than for her angelic voice."

The tragedy of a young and promising actor, Hildebrand Horden, for once in a way had nothing to do with a woman. As a youngster Horden achieved considerable success in the latter part of Charles II.'s reign, and eventually his death came about as the sequel to a brawl at the Rose Tavern in Covent Garden. He and two or three friends were quietly discussing their wine, when some "fine gentlemen" in an adjoining room pretended to be disturbed by them. High words followed, when poor Horden was killed by Captain Burgess. He was so handsome and popular

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with the sex that lovely (and other) ladies went weeping to gaze upon his body after death. Curiously enough, two men were tried and acquitted for his murder or manslaughter. These were the said Captain Burgess and a John Pitts. Pepys does not hesitate to assert that the former "killed Mr. Horden."

## CHAPTER VI

### NELL GWYN ON THE STAGE

The two patent theatres.—The King's House.—The Duke's House.—Nell Gwyn's first appearance at the King's House.—Plays leading parts.—Cydaria in *The Indian Emperor*.—Pepys's opinion of her performance.—The theatres closed during the Great Plague of London.—The Great Fire.—Private theatricals.—*The English Monsieur*.—*The Humorous Lieutenant*.—*Secret Love, or, The Maiden Queen*.—Nell Gwyn as Florimel.—Nell Gwyn in male attire.—She dances a jig.—Her best performances in comedy.—Her dislike of serious parts.—Moll Davis, an excellent dancer.—She attracts the King's attention.—“My lodging it is on the cold ground.”—Moll Davis becomes the King's mistress.—She bears him a daughter.—The Queen's disapproval.—Nell Gwyn plays her rival a scurvy trick.—Moll Davis pensioned off.

THE theatres had been closed under the Commonwealth, but at the Restoration it was decided as a matter of course to reopen them. However, Charles II. acting, it is believed, on the advice of Clarendon, decided to license only two theatres in the Metropolis. One of these was called “the King's House,” and the patent for this was granted to Thomas Killigrew; the other, as a compliment to the heir presumptive to the throne, was known as “the Duke's House,” and was controlled by Sir William d'Avenant. Killigrew and d'Avenant were both well-known courtiers, and Killigrew especially had an intimate association with the King, for his sister Elizabeth, who married Francis Boyle, first Viscount Shannon, was for a while Charles's mistress and bore him a daughter,

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Charlotte Jemima Henrietta Boyle (*alias* Fitzroy), who was created Countess of Yarmouth.

Killigrew, who was born in 1612, was appointed a page to Charles I., and was loyal to that monarch throughout all his troubles, and later attached himself to Prince Charles, joining him in his exile in Paris in 1647. He had written plays which had been produced in London, had plenty of wit, and no morals whatsoever, and these qualities endeared him to the Court. After the Restoration he was appointed Groom of the Bedchamber, and, presently, Chamberlain to the Queen.

The greatest mark of the royal favour, however, was the granting of a patent in 1660 to erect a new playhouse in London and to raise a company of players—which company became known as “the King’s Players.” This was not a mere empty compliment, for the actors were sworn in at the Lord Chamberlain’s office to serve the King. Ten of them were made members of the Royal Household, were styled in the warrants of appointment “Gentlemen of the Great Chamber,” and were allowed annually ten yards of scarlet cloth and an amount of silver lace with which to provide themselves with liveries.

D’Avenant’s company first played in Salisbury Court, and in June, 1661, removed to Portugal Row, Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

. While the theatre in Drury Lane was being built, Killigrew’s company acted in a house in Vere street, Clare Market, not far from the site now occupied by the Royal Courts of Justice. A very unsavoury

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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neighbourhood it was then and later, if the description of it by John Gay in " Trivia " may be accepted :

" Where the fair columns of St. Clement stand,  
Whose straighten'd bounds encroach upon the Strand ;  
Where the low penthouse bows the walker's head,  
And the rough pavement wounds the yielding tread ;  
Where not a post protects the narrow space,  
And strung in twines, combs dangle in thy face ;  
Summon at once thy courage, rouse thy care,  
Stand firm, look back, be resolute, beware.  
Forth issuing from steep lanes, the collier's steeds  
Drag the black load ; another cart succeeds,  
Team follows team, crouds heap'd on crouds appear  
And wait impatient till the road grow clear.  
Now all the pavement sounds with trampling feet,  
And the mixt hurry barricades the street.  
Entangled here, the waggon's lengthen'd team  
Cracks the tough harness : here a pond'rous beam  
Lies overturn'd athwart ; for slaughter fed  
Here lowing bullocks raise their horned head.  
Now oaths grow loud, with coaches coaches jar,  
And the smart blow provokes the sturdy war ;  
From the high box they whirl the thong around,  
And with the twining lash their shins resound :  
Their rage ferments, more dang'rous wounds they try,  
And the blood gushes down their painful eye.  
And now on foot the frowning warriors light,  
And with their pond'rous fists renew the fight ;  
Blow answers blow, their cheeks are smear'd with blood,  
Till down they fall, and grappling roll in mud."

The building of Drury Lane Theatre, which was on the site of the present one, was begun in March, 1661. It cost £1,500, and was thought to be very large. It was opened on May 7, 1663, and the next day Pepys visited it with his wife : " The house is

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made with extraordinary good convenience, and yet hath some faults, as the narrowness of the passages in and out of the pit, and the distance from the stage to the boxes, which I am confident cannot hear ; but for all other things is well ; only above all, the music being below, and most of it sounding under the very stage, there is no hearing of the basses at all, nor very well of the trebles, which sure must be mended." It was this theatre that was burnt down in January, 1672, when the new edifice was erected from the designs of Christopher Wren. The principal entrance was in Playhouse Passage. This new building, which was opened on March 26, 1674, seems to have been more comfortable. Colley Cibber gives a pleasant enough account of it in his "Apology." "As there are not many spectators who may remember what form the Drury Lane stood before the old Patentee, to make it hold more money, took it into his head to alter it, it were but justice to lay the original figure, which Sir Christopher Wren first gave it, and the alterations of it now standing, in a fair light. It must be observed then, that the area and platform of the old stage projected about four feet forwarder, in a semi-oval figure, parrallel to the benches of the pit ; and that the former lower doors of entrance for the actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) Pilasters ; in the place of which doors, now the two stage-boxes are fixed. That where the doors of entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional side-wings, in front to a full set of scenes, which had then almost a double effect in their loftiness and

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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magnificence. By this original form, the usual station of the actors, in almost every scene, was advanced at least ten feet nearer to the audience than they now can be."

The first performance at the new house was Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Humorous Lieutenant*. Killigrew's company then included Bateman, Baxter, Theophilus Bird, Blagden, Nicholas Burt, William Cartwright, Walter Clun, Duke, Hancock, Charles Hart, Edward Kynaston, John Lacy, Michael Mohun, William Shatterel, Robert Shatterel and William Wintershall. Later were added Beeston, Bell, Charleton, "Scum" Goodman, Griffin, Hains, Harris, Lyddal, Reeves and Shirley. Until the Restoration there were no actresses, and the women's parts were played by boys. In their youth Hart and Clun had been successful in the portrayal of female characters in the plays at the theatre in Blackfriars. Now women's parts were undertaken by women. Killigrew engaged Mrs. Hughes, the mistress of Prince Rupert and the first woman to act on the English stage. Mrs. Knipp (so often mentioned by Pepys), Anne Marshall, Rebecca Marshall, Mrs. Rutter and Mrs. Uphill (who married Sir Robert Howard). These were presently reinforced by Mrs. Boutel, Mrs. James, Mrs. Knight, Mrs. Verjuice, and, in 1665, Nell Gwyn.

Cunningham tells us that the old stock plays were divided between the two companies. The King's House had *Othello*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Henry the Fourth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, *The Fox*, *The*

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*Silent Woman* and *Catiline* ; Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Rollo*, *The Elder Brother*, *Philaster* and *The Scornful Lady* ; Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*, and James Shirley's *The Traitor*. As against these the Duke's House had *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry the Eighth*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* ; Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Middleton's *The Young Changeling*, Fletcher's *A Loyal Subject*, and Massinger's *The Bondman*. The playwrights of the day usually associated themselves exclusively with one or other theatre. At Portugal Row Davenant produced his own plays, and, among others, those of Lord Orrery and Sir George Etherege ; while Killigrew put on at Drury Lane his own comedies, and gathered round him Dryden, Sir Robert Howard, Sir Charles Sedley and Nathaniel Lee.

Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre stood in Portugal Row, which was south of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was at the back of what is now the Royal College of Surgeons. The first of the three theatres on this site, which was originally Lisle's Tennis Court, was opened by Sir William d'Avenant in 1660, "having new scenes and decorations, being the first that ere were introduced in England." "It is," wrote Pepys, "the finest playhouse, I believe, that ever was in England." It may be here remarked that d'Avenant died in April, 1668, and that three years later the Duke's company went to the new theatre in Dorset Gardens. When the theatre in Drury Lane was burnt down in

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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February, 1762, the King's Company played for the time being at the theatre in Portugal Row.

Lincoln's Inn Fields, in spite of its immediate proximity to the Inns of Court of that name, was a rough part of London in those days, and we read in Pepys in March, 1668: "Great talk of the tumult . . . among the prentices, taking the liberty of these holidays to pull down brothels. . . . So Creed and I to Lincoln's Inn Fields, thinking to have gone into the Fields to have seen the apprentices; but here we found the fields full of soldiers all in a body, and my Lord Craven commanding of them, and riding up and down to give orders, like a madman." There is mention of the place also in Gay's "Trivia":

"Where Lincoln's Inn, wide space, is rail'd around,  
Cross not with adventurous step, there oft is found  
The lurking thief, who, while the daylight shone,  
Made the walls echo with his begging tone:  
That crutch, which late compassion moved, shall wound  
Thy bleeding head, and fell thee to the ground.  
Though thou art tempt'd by the linkman's call,  
Yet trust him not along the lonely wall;  
In the mid-way he'll quench the flaming brand,  
And share the booty with the pilf'ring band.  
Still keep the public streets, where oily rays,  
Shot from the crystal lamp, o'erspread the ways."

Across Lincoln's Inn Fields on the north, between Holborn and the Fields, is an alley, Whetstone Park—it took its name from William Whetstone, an overseer of the Parish of St. Giles-in-the-Fields in the time of Charles I.—which in the day of Nell Gwyn was especially notorious for immorality, and it was this spot that the apprentices were making for when the

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military stopped them. There are several allusions to Whetstone Park in the literature of the day. Butler mentions it :

“ And makes a brothel of a palace,  
Where harlots ply, as many tell us,  
Like brimstones in a Whetstone alehouse.”

Crowne, in “ The County Wit,” has it : “ After I had gone a little way in a great broad street, I turned into a tavern hard by a place they call a Park ; and just as one park is all trees, that park is all houses—I asked if they had any deer in it, and they told me not half so many as they used to have ; but that if I had a mind to a doe, they would put a doe to me.” And Dryden makes one of his characters make some scruple of going to the aforesaid place, for fear of meeting his own father there.

There is, apparently, no record of the early appearances of Nell Gwyn, and it is from Pepys that we learn that she was already on the stage early in 1665. “ Then with Creed, my wife, and Mercer, to a play at the Duke’s, of my Lord Orrery, called *Mustapha*, which being not good, made Betterton’s part and Ianthe’s but ordinary too, so that we were not contented by it at all,” he wrote in his Diary on April 3, 1665. “ All the pleasure of the play was, the King and my Lady Castlemaine were there, and pretty witty Nell, at the King’s House, and the younger [Rebecca] Marshall sat next us ; which pleased me mightily.” So it is fixed that at this time she was already acting.

The first performance of Nell Gwyn which is recorded is *Cydaria*, the daughter of Montezuma, in



The Plague



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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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Dryden's play, *The Indian Emperor*. How she fared on this occasion is not known, but it is generally agreed that the part was unsuited to her. Still, she cannot have been so bad, for when the play was revived from time to time, she still retained her part. Pepys, however, was vigorous in his denunciation, even when Nell Gwyn had had more experience. Thus, on August 22, 1667, he wrote : " With my lord Brouncker and his mistress to the King's playhouse, and there saw *The Indian Emperor*, where I found Nell come again, which I am glad of ; but was most infinitely displeased with her being put to act the Emperor's daughter, which is a great and serious part, which she does most basely. The rest of the play, though pretty good, was not well acted by most of them, methought ; so that I took no great content in it." And yet again on the following November 11 : " To the King's playhouse, and there saw *The Indian Emperor*, a good play, but not so good as people cry it up. I think, though, above all things, Nell's ill-speaking of a great part made me mad."

Before Nell Gwyn had obtained any great amount of experience, there came an interruption to her theatrical career. The Great Plague of London had begun in December, 1664, but it was in its early stages apparently treated with indifference.

Anyhow, it was not taken very seriously, until it began to rage in the following May, when it set London in a panic. This is not the place to write the history of that terrible scourge which is said to have carried off over sixty thousand of the inhabitants. Medical

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science, though in its infancy in this country as regards the prevention of infection, was still sufficiently far advanced to realize that it was dangerous for people to mingle in crowds, and all public resorts were closed.

"All the Plays and Interludes, which after the manner of the French Court had been set up and began to increase among us, were forbid to act," Defoe wrote. "The Gaming Tables, public Dancing Rooms and Music-Houses, which multiplied and began to debauch the manners of the people, were shut up and suppressed; and the Jack-Puddings, Merry Andrews, Puppet Shows, Rope Dancers and such-like doings, which had bewitched the poor common people, shut up their shops, finding indeed no trade, for the minds of the people were agitated with other things, and a kind of sadness and horror at these things sate upon the countenances even of the common people. Death was before their eyes, and everybody began to think of their graves, not of mirth and diversions."

What Nell Gwyn did in these days can only be conjectured. It may be that she still lived with Charles Hart; it may be that she took to herself other lovers. Certainly she had no visible means of subsistence, though she may have acted with the King's Company in some entertainments given privately at Court and at the houses of persons of rank and wealth. This, however, would in itself scarcely have provided her with sufficient means during the long period of the cessation of public performances.

The Great Fire of London, which raged from September 2, 1666, for four days and devastated some



The Great Fire of London.



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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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four hundred acres, purified the air and so drove away the Plague. It was not until November 20, however, that officially the Plague ceased to exist. On that day Pepys wrote in his Diary: "To Church, it being Thanksgiving Day, for the cessation of the Plague; but the Town do say, that it is hastened before the Plague is quite over, there being some people still ill of it; but only to get ground of Plays to be publicly acted, which the Bishops would not suffer till the Plague was over."

But though the Plague was banished, so to speak, by the King in Council, the terror that it had inspired and the sadness of the bereaved survivors remained for a long time to come. The theatres reopened soon after Thanksgiving Day, but it was some time before they regained their popularity, and Thomas Killigrew complained that the audiences at the King's House were not half so large as they were in the days before the Plague, although he declared that by his efforts "the stage is now a thousand times better and more glorious than ever heretofore. Now, wax candles and many of them; then, two or three fiddlers, now, nine or ten of the best; then, nothing but rushes upon the ground, and everything else mean; then, the Queen seldom, and the King never would come; now, the King not only for state, but all civil people do think they may come as well as any."

There is no full record of Nell Gwyn's theatrical career, and it is impossible to compile it from the scanty notes that have come down to us. But, indeed, a few records would serve little useful purpose, since most

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## Nell Gwyn

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of the plays then staged are unknown to-day, or at most glanced at out of curiosity by some student of the period.

In December, 1666, Nell Gwyn was playing Lady Wealthy in the Hon. James Howard's comedy, *The English Monsieur*, and in this she seems to have been well suited and to have scored heavily. Pepys, who saw it, was enthusiastic: "To the King's House, and there did see a good part of *The English Monsieur*, which is a mighty pretty play, very witty and pleasant. And the women do very well, but above all little Nelly; that I am mightily pleased with the play, and much with the House, the women doing better than I expected; and very fair women."

When, some weeks later, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Humorous Lieutenant* was put up, Nell Gwyn was cast for Celia, in which Pepys (who is the only contemporary authority for her theatrical career) thought well of her.

"Thence to the King's House," he wrote on January 23, 1667, "and there saw *The Humorous Lieutenant*; a silly play, I think; only the spirit in it that grows very tall, and then sinks again to nothing, having two heads breeding upon one, and then Knipp's singing did please us. Here in a box above, we spied Mrs. Pierce; and going out, they called us all in and brought us to Nelly, a most pretty woman, who acted the great part of Ceolia to-day very fine, and did it pretty well: I kissed her and so did my wife; a mighty pretty soul she is. We also saw Mrs. Hall, which is my little Roman-nose black girl, that is mighty pretty:

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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she is usually called Betty. Knipp made us stay in a box and see the dancing preparatory for to-morrow for *The Goblins*, a play of Suckling's not acted these twenty-five years ; and so away thence, pleased with this sight also, and specially kissing of Nell."

Dryden, whose plays were produced at the King's House, contrived to provide Nell Gwyn with some of her best parts. In his *Secret Love, or, The Maiden Queen*, she appeared as Florimel, a character that gave her great opportunity, of which she made the best use. On the first night the King was present, he having, it was said, an especial interest, as it was supposed that he had suggested the plot to its author.

"After dinner," says Pepys on March 2, 1667, "with my wife to the King's House to see *The Maiden Queen*, a new play of Dryden's, mightily commended for the regularity of it, and the strain and wit ; the truth is, there is a comical part done by Nell, which is Florimel, that I never can hope ever to see the like done by man or woman. The King and Duke of York were at the play. But so great a performance of a comical part was never, I believe, in the world before as Nell do this both as a mad girl, then most and best of all when she comes in like a young gallant ; and hath the motions and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her."

Three weeks later, accompanied by Sir William Penn, Pepys saw *The Maiden Queen* again—"which indeed the more I see the more I like, and is an excellent play, and so done by Nell, her merry part, as cannot

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## Nell Gwyn

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be better done in nature, I think." And on his third visit he stressed his praise, declaring that "it is impossible to have Florimel's part, which is the most comical that ever was made for woman, ever done better than it is by Nelly."

Hart as Celadon and Nell Gwyn as Florimel bore the brunt of the performance, and good as Hart was, it was the actress who made the success of the play. As Cunningham has pointed out, there are incidents and allusions in the two leading parts which must have carried a personal application to those who were in the know as regards what was going on behind the scenes—that the actor and actress were living together, anyhow, more or less regularly. Their marriage in the play is more of a mockery than a religious ceremony—as Florimel is made to say, they are married by the more agreeable names of mistress and gallant rather than those dull old-fashioned ones of husband and wife. It is recorded that the King—of all people in the world!—objected to the last scene where Celadon and Florimel treat too lightly of their marriage in the presence of the Queen!

Nell Gwyn had the best of the dialogue, she appeared in boy's attire, she danced a jig—then a most popular interlude—and she spoke the Epilogue, specially written for her, in which the author defends him and in which is introduced a reference to herself:

" Our poet, something doubtful of his fate,  
Made choice of me to be his advocate,  
Relying on my knowledge in the laws ;  
And I as boldly undertook the cause.

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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I left my client yonder in a rant,  
Against the envious, and the ignorant,  
Who are, he says, his only enemies ;  
But he condemns their malice, and defies  
The sharpest of his censurers to say,  
Where there is one gross fault in all his play.  
The language is so fitted for each part,  
The plot according to the rules of art,  
And twenty other things he bid me tell you ;  
But I cried, E'en go do't yourself for Nelly !  
Reason with judges, urged in the defence  
Of those they would condemn, is insolence ;  
I therefore waive the merits of his play,  
And think it fit to plead this safer way,  
If when too many in the purchase share,  
Robbing's not worth the danger nor the care.  
The men of business must, in policy,  
Cherish a little harmless poetry, }  
All wit would else grow up to knavery. }  
Wit is a bird of music, or of prey ;  
Mounting she strikes at all things in her way.  
But if this birdlime once but touch her wings  
On the next bush she sits her down and sings  
I have but one word more ; tell me, I pray,  
What you will get by damning of our play ?  
A whipt fanatic, who does not recant,  
Is, by his brethren, called a suffering saint ;  
And by your hands should this poor poet die,  
Before he does renounce his poetry,  
His death must needs confirm the party more,  
Than all his scribbling life could do before :  
Where so much zeal does in a sect appear,  
'Tis to no purpose, faith, to be severe.  
But t'other day, I heard this rhyming fop  
Say,—Critics were the whips, and he the top ;  
For as a top spins more, the more you baste her,  
So, every lash you give, he writes the faster."

It was in parts such as Celia and Florimel that Nell Gwyn especially distinguished herself. The tragedy

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## Nell Gwyn

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of the actor and the actress is that only a contemporary can really form any judgment of their qualities. Tradition is the only authority, and not a reliable one. What is regarded as good in one generation is often condemned in the next. What, for instance, would a modern audience say of Mrs. Siddons and Kemble, if they acted now in the manner that they did in their day? The style of the comedian, however, is less dated than that of tragedian, and Nell Gwyn would probably have been as popular to-day as in the seventeenth century—a sort of Nelly Farren without song.

Of her success in her own day there is no question. At the age of fourteen she was at once cast for leading parts. She was certainly at her best in robustious comedy—her impudence and joy of living affected the audience to enthusiasm. Downes reports that “she acted the most spirited and fantastic parts, and spoke a prologue or epilogue with admirable address. Indeed, it was sometimes carried to extravagance : but even her highest flights were so natural, that they rather provoked laughter than excited disgust.”

That Nell Gwyn was happiest in comedy or farce she has herself put on record. She cordially disliked playing serious parts, and this was an open secret at the time, for she made no disguise of the fact. In the Epilogue to the tragedy, *The Duke of Lerma*, she had to say :

“ I know you in your hearts

Hate serious plays—as I hate serious parts,”

and it may be taken for granted that she delivered

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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these lines with gusto, as she did also those in the Epilogue to Dryden's *Tyrannic Love*, in which play in 1669 she played Valeria :

" I die

Out of my calling in a tragedy."

It was said at one time that she was cast for such parts at the instance of Hart, who arranged this in a spirit of revenge for her having deserted him for Lord Buckhurst. To this Cunningham subscribes, but it must be remembered that before Hart had any reason to be annoyed with her, she had played in tragedy.

Nell Gwyn especially delighted her audience when she played masculine parts, and she was so charming in male attire that it actually became the fashion for the ladies of Whitehall to dress as men, which in the seventeenth century was not only very charming but also very bright in colour.

Nell Gwyn not only acted herself into popular favour, but also danced herself into it. As in *Secret Love*, so in her part in *All Mistaken, or, A Mad Couple*, Nell had to say : " A fiddler, nay, then I am made again. I'd have a dance if I had nothing but my smock on." Nell became famous for her dancing of the jig, which is believed to be of French origin or a rustic dance with some foreign innovations.

In the Epilogue to Fletcher's comedy, *The Chances*, as altered by the Duke of Buckingham, and performed at the theatre in Dorset Gardens in 1682, there is an allusion to Nell Gwyn's dancing of jigs in which fun is poked at those dramatists who thought the

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## Nell Gwyn

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success of the evening was theirs when it was really due to her :

“ Besides, the author dreads the strut and mien  
Of new prais'd poets, having often seen  
Some of his fellows, who have writ before,  
When Nell danc'd her Jig, steal to that door,  
Hear the pit clap, and with conceit of that,  
Swell, and believe themselves the Lord knows what.”

Not only Nell Gwyn danced herself into the King's bed. There was Mary Davis or Davies, commonly called Moll Davis, a leading actress at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. She made her great hit in 1667 in a revival of *The Rivals*, adapted by Sir William d'Avenant from *The Noble Kinsmen* of Beaumont and Fletcher. In this play, says Downes, “all the women's parts were admirably acted, but what pleased most was the part of Celania, a shepherdess, mad for love, and her song of ‘My Lodging is on the cold ground,’ which she performed so charmingly that not long after it raised her from her bed on the cold ground to a bed royal.”

“ My lodging it is on the cold ground,  
And very hard is my fare,  
But that which troubles me most is  
The unkindness of my dear.  
Yet still I cry, ‘O turn, love,  
And I prythee, love, turn to me,  
For thou art the man that I long for,  
And alack what remedy!’

“ I'll crown thee with a garland of straw, then,  
And I'll marry thee with a rush ring,  
My frozen hopes shall thaw then,  
And merrily we will sing.

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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'O turn to me, my dear love,  
And prythee, love, turn to me,  
For thou art the man that alone canst  
Procure my liberty.'

" But if thou wilt harden thy heart still,  
And be deaf to my pitiful moan,  
Then I must endure the smart still,  
And tumble in straw alone.  
Yet still I cry, ' O turn, love,  
And I prythee, love, turn to me,  
For thou art the man that alone art  
The cause of my misery.' "

Moll Davis was apparently more popular as a dancer than as an actress. Pepys records on March 7, 1667, that " little Miss Davis did dance a jig after the end of the play, and there telling the next day's play, so that it come in by force only to please the company to see her dance in boy's clothes ; and the truth is there is no comparison between Nell's dancing the other day at the King's House in boy's clothes and this, this being infinitely beyond the other." He also, some months later, notes that in a performance of Shirley's *Love Tricks*, " Miss Davis dancing in a shepherd's clothes did please us mightily." Indeed, the diarist, who makes frequent mention of her, was clearly attracted by her, and seems not to have concealed his admiration.

The following is a contemporary tribute to Moll Davis's skill :

To *Mis Davies*,  
*On her excellent dancing.*

" Dear Mis,  
WHO woud not think to see the dance so light,  
Thou wer't all *air*, or else all *soul* and *spirits* ?

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## Nell Gwyn

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Or who'd not say to see thee onely tred,  
Thy *feet* were *Feathers*, others *feet* but *lead* ?  
*Athlanta* well coud run, and *Hermes* flee,  
But none ere mov'd more gracefully than thee :  
And *Circe* charm'd with wand and Majick Lore,  
But none like thee ere charm'd with *feet* before.  
Thou Miracle ! whom all men must admire  
To see thee move like *air* and mount like *fire* !  
Those who would follow thee, or come but nigh  
To thy perfection, must not dance, but *fly*."

About the end of 1667, the King began to look with favour upon Moll Davis. Pepys, who never missed a titbit of gossip, of course heard of this, and noted it in his Diary on New Year's Day : " Mrs. Pierce did sit near the players of the Duke's House ; among the rest, Miss Davis, who is the most impertinent slut, she says, in the world ; and the more, now the King do show her countenance ; and is reckoned his mistress, even to the scorn of the whole world ; the King gazing on her and my Lady Castlemaine being melancholy and out of humour all the play, not smiling once. The King, it seems, hath given her a ring of £700, which she shows to everybody and owns that the King did give it ; and he hath furnished a house in Suffolk Street most richly for her, which is a most infinite shame. It seems that she is a bastard of my Lord Berkshire, and that he hath got her for the King ; but Pierce says that she is a most homely jade as ever she saw, though she dances beyond anything in the world."

Ten days later, confirmation of the existence of the liaison came to the diarist's ears : " Knipp came

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## Nell Gwyn on the Stage

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and sat by us, and her talk pleased me a little, she telling me how Miss Davis is for certain going away from the Duke's House, the King being in love with her ; and a house is taken for her, and furnishing ; and she hath a ring given her already worth £600 : that the King did send several times for Nelly, and she was with him, but what he did she knows not ; this was a good while ago, and she says that the King first spoiled Mrs. Weaver, which is very mean, methinks, in a Prince, and I am sorry for it and can hope for no good to the State from having a Prince so devoted to his pleasure."

It must have been about this time that Moll Davis, at one of the performances at Court, was towards the end of the evening to dance a jig. The Queen did not wait to see it, and the general opinion was that her departure was meant to indicate displeasure. But the royal lady must by this time have been inured to her husband's infidelities, and one more or less could have made little difference to her.

About May, 1668, Moll Davis left the stage. At her house in Suffolk Street she gave birth to a daughter, the parentage of which was acknowledged by the King. The girl was called Lady Mary Tudor, and married Francis Ratcliffe, second Earl of Derwentwater. Moll Davis was much in evidence in those days. "It vexed me," Pepys wrote on December 1, 1668, "to see Moll Davis, in the box over the King's and my lady Castlemaine's, look down upon the King and he up to her ; and so did my Lady Castlemaine once, to see who it was ; but when she saw Moll Davis, she looked like fire ; which troubled me."

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## Nell Gwyn

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Nell Gwyn, whose position with the King was not then firmly established, was also annoyed. She was in no mood to bear another rival near her throne, and she acted, according to an account that has been handed down, in a manner at once characteristic of her and of the times in which she lived. Hearing one evening that Moll Davis had been told to go late to the King's bedchamber, she asked her rival to come to her before doing so. Moll accepted the invitation, and Nell gave her sweetmeats that she had filled with jalap. A scurvy trick, to be sure, and scarcely excusable even on the grounds that all is fair in love.

Moll Davis did not long retain her hold over the King, and some time after the birth of her daughter she was pensioned off with £1,000 a year. Of her subsequent doings there is no record.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME RESTORATION RAKES

Nell Gwyn's success as a woman.—She attracts the most distinguished men about town —John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester.—George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham.—Henry Jermyn, Lord Dover.—Count de Grammont.

NELL GWYN'S success as a woman was at least as marked as her success as an actress. That all the men made love to her goes without saying—that, as has been said, was the fashion of the day as regards actresses ; but she attracted some of the most distinguished men about town, by whom even to be noticed was taken as a compliment. William Oldys repeats the report that the second Duke of Buckingham, then as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber enjoying the royal favour, paid his addresses to her, and that Lord Rochester had intentions that were not, in modern phrase, strictly honourable. It may be suspected that Nell either rebuffed Rochester or in some way annoyed him, because without some such reason it is almost impossible to account for his many vitriolic references to her. It may have been some high-spirited prank of hers, for she had a gay, frolicsome and humorous disposition, and there are many tales told of her, most of them too loose to be repeated in this polite age. Sir George Etherege, too, may have

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## Nell Gwyn

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pursued her, and Sir Charles Sedley, anyhow, was much in her company when she was the mistress of his very intimate friend, Lord Buckhurst.

Probably of all the Restoration rakes about the Court the most brilliant and the most profligate was John Wilmot, who, in 1658, succeeded his father as (second) Earl of Rochester. The father, who entered the army in 1635, presently represented Tamworth in the Long Parliament, but in 1641 was expelled from the House for taking part in the plot to overawe Parliament with the army. He fought on the royalist side during the two succeeding years, but was then deprived of his command on suspicion of treating with Parliament. He went abroad, and in 1649 was appointed a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to Charles II., whom three years later he accompanied to Scotland and in his wanderings after the Battle of Worcester. For these services an earldom was bestowed upon him.

John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, is a much better known figure, and an ornament at the Court of Charles II. Grammont wrote of him: "Never did any man write with more ease, humour, spirit and delicacy; but he was, at the same time, the most severe satirist." A precocious child, it is regarded that at the time of the Restoration, when he was twelve years old, he recommended himself to Charles II. as:

"One whose ambition 'tis for to be known  
By daring loyalty your Wilmot's son."

At the age of thirteen this extraordinary boy took the M.A. degree at Oxford, when Lord Clarendon,

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Chancellor of the University, signalized the event by kissing him. At eighteen, the youth found himself admitted to all the licence and luxury of the Court. He was then splendidly handsome, an admitted wit, and Charles took a strong liking to him.

In 1665 Rochester joined the Navy as a volunteer and displayed, in the unsuccessful assault on the Dutch ships at Bergen, courage.

It would have been well for him had he remained in the service, but the Dutch war over, he came again to Court and plunged into every kind of licentiousness in company with the Duke of Buckingham, Sir Charles Sedley and Henry Savile. He told Burnet that for five consecutive years he was never sober, and judging by the stories that have been handed down about him there is no reason to believe he was doing himself an injustice. Burnet, who knew Rochester at first-hand, wrote of him that he "seemed to have freed himself from all impressions of virtue or religion, of honour or of good-nature. He delivered himself without either restraint or decency to all the pleasures of wine and women. He had but one maxim, to which he adhered firmly, that he had to do everything, and deny himself in nothing, that might maintain his greatness. He was unhappily made for drunkenness, for he drank all his friends dead." The judgment, even allowing for the times in which he lived, is not a whit too severe.

Nevertheless, well as he carried his drink, Rochester's steady imbibing occasionally led him into ludicrous blunders, as when, intending to hand the

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King a lampoon directed at certain ladies, he had the ill-luck to hand Charles one written about himself. He was frequently banished from Court, but was always readmitted after a brief exclusion.

Of one of these dismissals Grammont records :

“ The King did not generally let Lord Rochester remain long in exile. He grew weary of it, and being displeased that he was forgotten, he posted up to London to wait till it might be His Majesty’s pleasure to recall him. He first took up his habitation in the City among the capital tradesmen and rich merchants, where politeness, indeed, is not so much cultivated as at Court, but where pleasure, luxury and abundance reign with less confusion and more sincerity. His first design was only to be initiated into the mysteries of those fortunate and happy inhabitants : that is to say, by changing his name and dress to gain admittance to their feasts and entertainments ; and, as occasion offered, to those of their loving spouses. As he was able to adapt himself to all capacities and humours, he soon deeply insinuated himself into the esteem of the substantial wealthy and into the affections of their more delicate, magnificent and tender ladies. He made one in all their feasts and at all their assemblies ; and, whilst in the company of the husbands, he declaimed against the faults and mistakes of government, he joined their wives in railing against the profligacy of the Court ladies, and in inveighing against the King’s mistresses. He agreed with them that the industrious poor were to pay for these cursed extravagances ; that the city beauties were not inferior to

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## Some Restoration Rakes

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those of the other end of London, and yet a sober husband in this quarter of the town was satisfied with one wife ; after which, to out-do their murmurings, he said that he wondered Whitehall was not yet consumed by fire from Heaven, since such rakes as Rochester, Killigrew and Sedley were suffered there, who had the impudence to assert that all married men in the City were cuckolds, and all their wives painted."

Rochester's marriage to the daughter of John Malet of Enmere, Somerset, was a pitiful business, as was indeed only to be expected. The lady had a fortune of £2,500 per annum, and the match had the seal of the Royal approval. It was therefore with surprise and disgust that the King heard that Rochester had attempted to carry out an entirely unnecessary abduction of Miss Malet. The latter had been supping in Whitehall with the beautiful Frances Stuart, and was returning home with her grandfather when her coach was "held up" at Charing Cross. The insensate attempt failed and Rochester was sent to the Tower ; but the lady not only forgave him, but became his wife shortly afterwards.

They had a family of four children ; but he neglected her consistently. She, however, was apparently entirely devoted to him. "If," she touchingly writes, "I could have been troubled at anything when I had the happiness of receiving a letter from you, I should be so because you did not name a time when I might hope to see you, the uncertainty of which very much afflicts me."

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Rochester, for his part, explained his constant absence from home by for ever protesting to her by letter of his constant attendance on the King : " I went away like a rascal without taking leave, dear wife. It is an unpolished way of proceeding, which a modest man ought to be ashamed of. I have left you a prey to your own imaginations amongst my relations, the worst of damnations. But there will come an hour of deliverance, till then, may my mother be merciful to you. . . . Pray write as often as you have leisure to your Rochester."

Rochester, worn out by his debaucheries, survived only to his thirty-third year, dying at his country home at Woodstock Park on July 26, 1680. He died a Catholic, professing all penitence for his past life, and Lady Rochester received the Sacrament with him. Their little son Charles, Lord Wilmot, survived his father by only a twelvemonth. To him Rochester had addressed the edifying injunction : " Avoid idleness, scorn lying, and God will bless you, which I pray."

Rochester, it has already been said, was the lover of Mrs. Barry, for whom he adapted Beaumont and Fletcher's *Valentinian*. " The noble poet, little more than thirty years old," says Dr. Doran, " lay in a dishonoured grave when his piece was represented ; but the young actress gaily alluded, in a prologue, to the demure nymphs in the house who had succumbed, nothing loth, to the irresistible blandishments of this very prince of blackguards."

This last phrase may well stand not only as an

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epitaph for him, but also for George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham. Elder son of the first Duke, the friend of Charles I., he was only a year old when his father was assassinated by John Felton at Portsmouth in 1628.

Buckingham fought for Charles II. at Worcester and, after many narrow escapes, got away to France. Like Lord Rochester, however (but in more desperate circumstances), he would not conceal himself while in deadly peril in London, but assumed a variety of disguises. He had a stage erected at Charing Cross, where he was attended by violins and puppet-players, and every day he produced ballads of his own composition upon what passed in the town, wherein he himself often had a share.

Buckingham daringly returned to England when Cromwell was at the height of his power. He married, in 1657, the daughter of Sir Thomas (Lord) Fairfax, the Parliamentary leader. The young suitor was acclaimed as being "the most graceful and beautiful person that any Court in Europe ever saw." This did not prevent Cromwell—who was said to have wanted Buckingham to marry one of his own daughters—from committing the bridegroom to the Tower. This led to a quarrel between Fairfax and the Lord Protector, but Buckingham, though removed to Windsor Castle, did not regain his liberty until the abdication of Richard Cromwell.

Then began Buckingham's unbridled career at the Court of Charles II., where he shone by reason of his handsome appearance, wit, and charm of manner.

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He was always ready to indulge in any kind of buffoonery, and he and a Colonel Titus entertained the King with an imitation of Lord Chancellor Clarendon, in which a pair of bellows did duty for the Privy Purse and a fire-shovel for the Mace.

On another occasion, the King being present at the Chapel Royal when a young and nervous clergyman preached from the text, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (while constantly wiping his face with black gloves from which the dye came off), the Duke led the roar of laughter which "held up" the sermon. While Lady Sunderland writes of an appointment for a public duty which Buckingham had made: "At the time appointed he could not be found; and afterwards they heard he was with a wench all that day."

The Duke produced at intervals a good deal of poetry of varying merit, as well as the farce or satire entitled *The Rehearsal*. This was staged at Drury Lane in 1671, and in its printed form five editions were published during the author's lifetime alone. *The Rehearsal* was chiefly an onslaught upon the "heroic" style of stage-play favoured by Dryden, who, however, made no public rejoinder to an attack which vastly entertained the public. Dryden did, however, eventually pen the oft-quoted epitaph upon the Duke, containing the bitterly satirical description:

"Who, in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon."

In the spring of 1667, Buckingham was foolish enough and base enough to engage in a conspiracy

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against his easy-going master and benefactor the King. The affair proved serious enough for the Duke to be arrested and examined before the Council in His Majesty's presence. However, the good-natured Charles pardoned him after a few weeks' detention in the Tower.

Incidentally there was a quarrel on the subject between the King and Lady Castlemaine, who demanded "with tears" the immediate release of the Duke. Charles called her a jade for meddling with affairs of State; nevertheless, the prisoner was duly released.

A few days after his restoration to favour the irrepressible *Buckingham* administered a sound thrashing to Henry Killigrew at the Duke's Theatre, apparently for having hinted at his fortunate escape from serious punishment.

About this time, too, *Buckingham* was engaged in two or three quarrels—he did not apparently get drunk like a gentleman. His dispute with Lord Ossory, the Duke of Ormonde's son, arose out of a Bill prohibiting the importation of Irish cattle into England. Ossory demanded satisfaction of *Buckingham*, but, according to Butler, "continual wine, women and musick had debauched the Duke's understanding," and a meeting did not take place. Next day *Buckingham* made a speech of such remarkable effrontery in the House of Lords that the incident was allowed to close in his favour.

Another difference of opinion was with the Marquis of Dorchester, and apparently Parliament was again

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## Nell Gwyn

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the scene. It is piquantly described by Pepys : " My Lord Buckingham, leaning rudely over my Lord Marquis Dorchester, my Lord Dorchester removed his elbow. Duke of Buckingham asked whether he was uneasy. Dorchester replied, yes, and that he durst not do this were he anywhere else. Buckingham replied, yes, he would, and that he was a better man than himself. Dorchester said that he lied. With this Buckingham struck off his hat, and took him by the periwig and pulled it aside, and held him. My Lord Chamberlain and others interfered, and upon coming into the House of Lords did order them to the Tower, whither they are to go this afternoon."

The most infamous of the Duke's rascalities was his affair with the Countess of Shrewsbury and duel to the death with her husband. The latter had for some time known of the intrigue, which continued until Lord Shrewsbury, who never before had shown the least uneasiness at his lady's misconduct, thought proper to resent it.

" It was public enough, indeed, but less dishonourable to her than any of her former intrigues," says Grammont. " Poor Lord Shrewsbury, too polite a man to make any reproaches to his wife, was resolved to have redress for his injured honour. He accordingly challenged the Duke of Buckingham ; and the Duke, as a reparation for his honour, having killed him upon the spot, remained a peaceable possessor of this famous Helen. The public was at first shocked at the transaction ; but the public grows familiar with

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everything by habit, and by degrees both decency, and even virtue itself, are rendered tame and overcome. The Queen was at the head of those who exclaimed against so public and scandalous a crime, and against the impurity of such a wicked act. As the Duchess of Buckingham was a short, fat body like Her Majesty, who never had had any children, and whom her husband had abandoned for another, this sort of parallel in their situations interested the Queen in her favour. But it was all in vain ; no person paid any attention to them ; the licentiousness of the age went on uncontrolled."

This Buckingham-Shrewsbury duel took place at Barnes Elms on January 17, 1668. The seconds on each side also fought. Jenkins, one of the Duke's seconds, was mortally wounded, Sir John Talbot severely injured, and Lord Shrewsbury himself died of his terrible wounds three months later.

The wanton Lady Shrewsbury is said to have dressed herself as a page and held Buckingham's horse while he slew her husband.

The reprobate Duke actually took her to his own house shortly after Lord Shrewsbury's death. To his wife's indignant protest that she could not live in the same house, he ruffianly replied : " So I thought, Madam, and have therefore ordered your coach to convey you to your father."

In the circumstances of the time, it is not a little surprising to hear that Buckingham was summoned to the bar of the House of Lords to answer for his conduct. Lady Shrewsbury had, in 1671, a child

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by Buckingham, and such were the times that the King stood sponsor to the infant.

For several years the couple lived in seclusion at Cliveden, on the Thames. Meanwhile the Countess engaged in a little secret-service work, while Buckingham was sent on a mission to Louis XIV.

In 1677 the Duke was again in disgrace, and on Charles' death he retired to what was left of his Yorkshire estates. By this time his debts were estimated at £140,000. If there is anything that does redound to his credit, it is that he refused to be helped out of the Privy Purse. After his death enough was saved from the wreck of his property to satisfy his creditors.

The following lines were addressed to Lady Shrewsbury by the Duke of Buckingham :

“ What a dull fool was I  
To think so gross a lie  
As that I ever was in Love before ?  
I have perhaps known one or two  
With whom I was content to be,  
At that which they call keeping company ;  
But after all that they could do,  
I still could be with more :  
Their absence never made me shed a tear,  
And I can truly swear  
That till my eyes first gaz'd on you  
I ne'er beheld that thing I could adore.  
A world of things must curiously be fought,  
A world of things must be together brought  
To make up charms which have the power to move  
Through a discerning eye true Love ;  
That is a masterpiece above  
What only looks and shape can do,



The Duke of Buckingham and the Countess of Shrewsbury.



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There must be wit and judgment too ;  
Greatness of thought and worth, which draw  
From the whole world, respect and awe.  
She that must raise a noble Love must find  
Ways to beget a passion for her mind ;  
She must be that which she to be wou'd seem,  
For all true Love is grounded on esteem :  
Plainness and Truth gain a more generous heart  
Than all the crooked subtleties of art.  
She must be—what said I ? She must be You.  
None but yourself that miracle can do ;  
At least I'm sure, thus much I plainly see,  
None but yourself e'er did it upon me :  
'Tis you alone that can my Heart subduc,  
To you alone it always shall be true ;  
Your God-like soul is that which rules my Fate,  
It does in me new passions still create,  
For Love of you all Women else I hate :  
But oh ! your body too is so Divine,  
I kill myself with wishing you all mine.  
In pain and anguish, night and day  
I faint, and melt away ;  
In vain against my grief I strive,  
My entertainment now is crying,  
And all the sense I have of being alive  
Is that I feel myself a-dying."

The Countess of Shrewsbury subsequently left Buckingham, and married George Rodney Bridges in 1680. This further set of verses by the Duke, entitled "The Lost Mistress : a Complaint against the Countess of —," may be interpreted as his lament :

. . . "What language can my injur'd passion frame  
That knows not how to give its wrongs a name ?  
My suffering heart can all relief refuse  
Rather than Her it did adore, accuse.  
Teach me, ye groves, some art to ease my pain,  
Some soft resentments that may leave no stain  
On her lov'd Name, and then I will complain.

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Till then to all my wrongs I will be blind,  
And whilst she's cruel call her but unkind.  
As all my thoughts to please her were employed,  
When of her smiles the Blessing I enjoy'd,  
So now by her forsaken and forlorn,  
I'll rack invention to excuse her scorn.  
While she to Truth and me unjust does prove,  
From her to Fate the blame I will remove ;  
Say 'twas a Destiny she could not shun,  
Fate made her change that I might be undone.  
Ere with perfidious guilt her Soul I'll tax,  
I'll charge it on the frailty of her sex ;  
Doom'd her first Mother's error to pursue :  
She ne'er was false, could Woman have been true  
Let all her sex henceforth be ever so.  
She had the power to make my bliss or woe,  
And she has given my heart its mortal blow.  
In Love the blessing of my Life I clos'd  
And in her custody that Love dispos'd.  
In one dear Freight all's lost ! Of her bereft  
I have no Hope, no second comfort left.  
If such another beauty I could find,  
A beauty too that bore a constant mind,  
Ev'n that could bring me med'cine for my pain,  
I lov'd not at a rate to love again.  
No change can ease for my sick heart prepare,  
Widow'd to Hope and wedded to Despair."

James II. is said to have done his best to "convert" the Duke, but the latter lived for little now save fox-hunting, dicing and drinking in Yorkshire. There the end came in an inn at Kirby-Moorside, identified by Pope in the famous passage, beginning, "In the worst inn's worst room." He was in his sixty-first year.

The vain and frivolous but not otherwise foolish Henry Jermyn, who was born in 1636, was the second son of Sir Thomas Jermyn of Rushbrooke, Suffolk,

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## Some Restoration Rakes

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and a nephew of Henry, first Earl of St. Albans. He seems to have devoted his life to amorous adventure, especially devoting himself to the ladies of the Court and not neglecting royalty itself.

When he was fifteen or sixteen he went abroad, and presently joined the Household of the Duke of York, accompanying His Royal Highness to Bruges in 1856 and to Holland in the following year. At The Hague he found so much favour with Mary, the widowed Princess of Orange, that Charles II. had to intervene to prevent undue scandal about his sister. Rumour current at the time hinted at a secret marriage.

After this affair was broken off abruptly, Jermyn completely fascinated the young and lovely Anne Hyde, wife of the Henry Hyde who became Earl of Clarendon. She was so infatuated that, according to one chronicler, she "was of opinion that so long as she was not talked of on account of Jermyn, all her other advantages would avail nothing for her glory: it was therefore to receive this finishing stroke that she resolved to throw herself into his arms."

At the Restoration Jermyn was appointed Master of the Horse to the Duke of York, and became a prominent figure in the fastest set of that licentious Court. In his misdemeanours and in his gambling he was aided and abetted by his uncle, who was certainly old enough to know better. He was one of the several men who shared the favours of Lady Castlemaine with the King, and he was for a while banished from Court. He was not long left to languish in exile.

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## Nell Gwyn

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On his return his next conquest was the Countess of Shrewsbury—this was before she fell in love with his friend Buckingham. This enraged Colonel Thomas Howard, brother of the Earl of Carlisle, who challenged Jermyn to a duel. A desperate combat took place in Pall Mall on August 18, 1662; Jermyn was so badly wounded that he was left for dead, and his second, Giles Rawlings, was slain on the spot. According to a passage in the "Verney Papers," it was not a fair fight: "It is also said that Howard was in buff, and that he cut off the heels of his boots, and so came fully prepared and took the other unawares; and yet Rawlings thrust so home that he bent his sword at the hilt, but buff or other armour would not suffer entrance."

On his recovery, Jermyn, undaunted by this misadventure, pursued his amorous career. He made overtures to Anthony Hamilton's sister, which were, however, repulsed. In 1667 he was again in favour with Lady Castlemaine, and Pepys noted: "The King is mad at her entertaining Jermyn," and so again he left town. Although after a fortnight he was given permission to return, he stayed in the country for six months, and only came out of his seclusion on hearing of the charms of Miss Jennings, to whom he at once laid siege.

When James II. ascended the throne, Jermyn, who was a Roman Catholic, began to play a part in public life. In 1685 he was raised to the peerage as Lord Dover, and in the following year was sworn of the Privy Council. At the Revolution he remained faith-

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## Some Restoration Rakes

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ful to James, and commanded a troop at the Battle of the Boyne. In 1692, however, he made his peace with William, and came to London and lived either there or on his estate at Cheveley until his death sixteen years later.

Philibert, Count de Grammont, another of the "bloods" of the period, whose memoirs have been so many times reprinted, married the beautiful Elizabeth Hamilton in 1668. A chartered libertine who would seem to have been utterly unworthy from the point of view of serious matrimony, he had been banished from the Court of Louis XIV. for having had the temerity to attempt to rival that potentate in the affections of La Motte Houdancourt. When permitted to return to France after a banishment of six years (spent in England), the Count had already been engaged to Miss Hamilton for that length of time. Even then he was about to quit England without carrying out his obligation to wed the lady, when he met her two brothers at Dover. "Have you forgotten nothing in London, Chevalier de Grammont?" they asked. "I fear I forgot to marry your sister!" was his rejoinder.

This episode, on which Molière is said to have founded his "*La Mariage Forcée*," led to their marriage shortly afterwards, and in 1669 the first of their two daughters (who became Lady Stafford) was born. Miss Hamilton had previously been approached by the Duke of York, after seeing her portrait in Sir Peter Lely's studio. "His proposals, however, were dishonourable," says Jesse, "and were haughtily

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## Nell Gwyn

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rejected. The Duke of Richmond, gamester and drunkard ; the simpleton Arundel, afterwards Duke of Norfolk ; the handsome and libertine Falmouth ; the Russells, uncle and nephew, celebrated by de Grammont ; and the lady-killer Jermyn, alike wore her chains and offered her their hands. De Grammont, graceful, impudent and clever, was more successful."

As a matter of fact, the Count was a mere gamester and man about town, and it was by the chance of his elder brother's death that he presently acquired great wealth. It is told of him that on an occasion when he was supposed to be dying, King Louis sent a particularly pious nobleman, the Marquis Dangeau, to attempt his repentance. After the good Marquis had been arguing with him for some time, de Grammont turned to his wife and remarked : " Countess, if you don't have a care, Dangeau will smuggle (*escamotera*) my conversion." The Count survived until 1707, when he had attained the great age of eighty-six.



Miss Hamilton



## CHAPTER VIII

### NELL GWYN AND LORD BUCKHURST

Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst.—Nell Gwyn retires from the stage.—Buckhurst takes her to live at Epsom.—The *Naison* soon over.—She returns to Drury Lane.

THERE must have been something about Nell Gwyn besides her face and figure to have attracted such men as Buckingham, Rochester and Etherege, because, while they were unbridled libertines, they were also men of wit and taste. So, too, was that Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, afterwards sixth Earl of Dorset, and first Earl of Middlesex, who, in 1667, was for a while the acknowledged lover of Nell Gwyn. He was then a gay spark of some thirty summers, at once courtier, libertine and poet. His poems appeared with those of his friend Sir Charles Sedley in 1701, and his song, "To all you Ladies now on land," which was written in 1665, is an accepted masterpiece. He was the friend and patron of other and less fortunately placed men of letters. He was on intimate terms with Dryden, who dedicated several poems to him, with Etherege, who dedicated to him "The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub," and with Congreve, who mentioned him in "An Allusion to the Tenth Satire of the First Book of Horace:"

"For pointed Satyr I wou'd Buckhurst choose,  
The best good man, with the worst-natur'd Muse."

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## Nell Gwyn

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Horace Walpole described him as "the finest gentleman in the voluptuous Court of Charles II.," and Peter Cunningham has written a happy little character-sketch of him :

"Buckhurst had other qualities to recommend him than his youth (he was thirty at this time), his rank, his good heart, and his good breeding. He had already distinguished himself by his personal intrepidity in the war against the Dutch ; had written the best song of its kind in the English language, and some of the severest and most refined satires we possess ; was the friend of all the poets of eminence in his time, as he was afterwards the most munificent patron of men of genius that this country has yet seen. The most eminent masters in their several lines asked and abided by his judgment, and afterwards dedicated their works to him in grateful acknowledgment of his taste and favours. Butler owed to him that the Court 'tasted' his 'Hudibras'; Wycherley that the town 'liked' his 'Plain Dealer'; and the Duke of Buckingham deferred to publish his 'Rehearsal' till he was sure, as he expressed it, that my Lord Buckhurst would not 'rehearse' upon him again. Nor was this all. His table was one of the last that gave us an example of the old housekeeping of an English nobleman. A freedom reigned about it which made every one of the guests think himself at home, and an abundance which showed that the master's hospitality extended to many more than those who had the honour to sit at table with himself. Nor has he been less happy

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## Nell Gwyn and Lord Buckhurst

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after death. Pope wrote his epitaph and Prior his panegyric."

At the time when Buckhurst made overtures to Nell Gwyn, she was living in lodgings at the "Cock and Pie," at the western side of the southern end of Drury Lane. It was subsequently numbered 88, and was in existence until 1880. Here Pepys saw her on May Day, 1667, as he recorded in a well-known passage :

"Thence to Westminster; in the way meeting many milk-maids with their garlands upon their pails, dancing with a fiddler before them; and saw pretty Nelly standing at her lodgings door in Drury Lane in her smock sleeves and bodice, looking upon one: she seemed a mighty pretty creature."

This must have been about the time when the *liaison* between her and Buckhurst began. Buckhurst, who had a mighty passion for her, was not inclined to share her with the theatre, and in July took her away from the King's House, making her, according to Pepys, send her parts to the House and say she would act no more. The same authority states that her lover undertook to give her £100 a year.

Buckhurst took her to Epsom, then celebrated for its waters. Pepys, who always seems to have been on the spot at the right moment, was there when the others were. "To Epsom, by eight o'clock, to the Well," he noted in the Diary on July 14; "where much company. And to the town to the 'King's Head'; and hear that my Lord Buckhurst and Nelly are lodged at the next house, and Sir Charles Sedley

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## Nell Gwyn

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with them ; and keep a merry house." A merry and a noisy, rackety house it must have been while the roisterers were there. The place where they stayed, Mr. Gordon Home, the authority on Epsom, informs us, "is still standing, the ground floor being utilized as a grocer's shop. Unfortunately, the interior has been altered to leave anything suggestive of that time, and one is forced to be content with knowing that the Court Favourite occupied the two little bay-windowed rooms overlooking the street, one of them being used as a bedroom, and the other as a sitting-room." This information must content us.

That Charles II. often visited Epsom is beyond question, and Mr. Home reports that tradition has it that he built for Nell Gwyn the stabling in Church Street, opposite St. Martin's, now known as "The Farm," now partly converted into a private house. "The age of the place certainly supports this belief," he says. "It consists of one long line of buildings under one unbroken gabled roof. The walls are a strange medley of red brick and great blocks of chalk covered with close-growing ivy, while the roof tiles are a beautiful subdued red." Well, every town is entitled to its traditions !

Pepys was much distressed by Nell Gwyn deserting the theatre. He thought that she who was so charming and so amusing and gave so much pleasure to many should not be withdrawn from the town to the country. It was all very well for Frances Davenport to go from Drury Lane and live with her lover, for she



Thence to Westminster in the way meeting many milk maids with  
their garlands upon their pails, dancing with a fiddler before them and saw  
pretty Nelly standing at her lodgings door in Drury Lane.



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## Nell Gwyn and Lord Buckhurst

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was a bad actress ; but with Nell Gwyn the case was different. Pepys alarmed himself unnecessarily.

The stay at Epsom was not of long duration. Nell was soon back again at the King's House. On August 22, she again played Cydaria in *The Indian Emperor*, and four days later Pepys had the pleasure of seeing her in *The Surprisal*—"a very mean play, I thought, or else it was because I was out of humour, and but very little company in the theatre."

It was on the occasion of this visit that Pepys, who, happily for posterity, was as curious as any monkey, held some discourse with Orange Moll, who told him "that Nell is already left by my Lord Buckhurst, and that he makes sport of her, and swears she hath had all she could get of him ; and Hart, her great admirer, now hates her, and that she is very poor, and hath lost my Lady Castlemaine, who was her great friend also, but she is come to the House, but is neglected by them all."

The matter, from the biographical point of view, is not so simply disposed of. It may be assumed that the gossip of Orange Moll was not always to be relied on, and it may well have been in this instance inspired by jealousy or envy. No young person can, in the course of a few months, pass from orange-girl to leading lady, with peers in her train, without making enemies.

Tradition has it that the *affaire* between Nell Gwyn and Buckhurst lasted for quite a while after their return to town—the visit to Epsom may, after all, have been in the nature of a brief holiday—and that, when presently His Gracious Majesty deigned to single

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## Nell Gwyn

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out for favour the little lady, he had first to get rid of the lover in possession.

Granger, in his "Biographical History," quotes a manuscript lampoon of the date 1686, which says Buckhurst would not part with Nell until he was reimbursed for the expenses he had lavished on her, and that, finally, the King created him Earl of Middlesex for his complaisance, or, as Sir George Etherege put it :

"Gave him an earldom to resign his b——h."

But, as a matter of fact, the story, though not incredible in those days, is demonstrably untrue, anyhow, as regards the peerage, for he was not given the earldom until 1675, some five years later.

A possible explanation is that Buckhurst was fond of Nell and did not wish to give her up, even to his royal master. It is certainly a fact that about Michaelmas, 1668, he was sent to France on a complimentary mission, or, as Dryden put it, on "a sleeveless errand." But here again chronology steps in, and though so sound an authority as the late Richard Garnett, in his biography of Buckhurst, says that this appointment was made to get him out of the way, it must be said that the necessity for so doing is not apparent, since the connection between the King and Nell had started at the beginning of that year, if not earlier.

Again, Count Hamilton, in his "Memoirs of Grammont," says that Buckhurst took Nell from the King, and there is a suggestion in the Appendix to Downes' "Roscius Anglicanus" to the effect that, while this was not the case, yet "it is not improbable that Nell

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### Nell Gwyn and Lord Buckhurst

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was afterwards kind to her first lover" (meaning Buckhurst). This suggestion, however, can, like the others, be dismissed, for, as will be seen, after Nell was installed as the King's mistress, there was never a suspicion as to her fidelity to him. If proof were necessary that the King had no doubt about the matter, it is to be found in the fact that some years later he appointed Buckhurst, who had then succeeded to the earldom of Dorset, as one of the trustees of Burford House, Oxford, which he had settled on Nell.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHARLES II., LUCY WALTER AND THE DUKE OF MONMOUTH

The birth of Charles.—His early years.—His troubles and tribulations.—His profligacy.—His wit.—His ability.—His laziness.—A contemporary pen-portrait.—His cynicism.—Burnet's account of him.—His way with him.—Love-making, not love.—Lucy Walter.—Her children by Charles.—The Duke of Monmouth.—His early life.—His marriage.—His amours.—His desire to succeed Charles.—In exile.—Charles denies Monmouth's legitimacy.—Monmouth's intrigues for the succession.—Eleanor Needham.—Again in exile.—Lady Wentworth follows him.—Sedgemoor.—The execution of Monmouth.

"**Y**ESTERDAY at noon," wrote Lord Dorchester on May 30, 1630, "the Queen was made the happy mother of a Prince of Wales. Herself, God be thanked, is in good estate, and what a child can promise that reckons yet but two days is already visible, as a gracious pledge from Heaven of those blessings which are conveyed and assured to Kingdoms in the issue of their Princes." So, duly approved by at least one courtier, Charles came into the world. It is said that in childhood he cherished a particular fondness for a billet of wood which he carried about by day and kept by his side at night, whereupon some wiseacre observed that "when the Prince came to years of maturity either oppressors or blockheads would be his greatest favourites." At the age of eight the Earl of Northumberland was

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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appointed his governor and Dr. Brian Duppa his tutor. In the following year he took his seat in the House of Lords. At the age of eleven he was placed, first, in the care of the Marquis of Hertford, and then of the Earl of Berkshire, which latter was an unwise choice.

At the age of twelve, he and his brother, James, Duke of York, were present at the battle of Edgehill. They were left in charge of William Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood, who became so absorbed in a book he was reading that he did not notice the bullets flying round him. The boys narrowly escaped being made prisoners. On March 4, 1645, he had his final parting with his father, and went to take command of the royalist forces in the west. A few months later Charles I. wrote to his son that whenever he found himself in personal danger he was to go to France and place himself in the care of his mother, "who is to have the absolute power of your education in all things except religion." After many adventures he arrived at Paris in July, 1646.

Already Charles was predisposed to love-affairs, and while he was in Jersey, where he stayed before going to France, there was born the first of his natural children. The story is related by Mr. Davidson, the historian of Catherine of Braganza :

"The mother of this first of his many illegitimate sons is said to have been of the most distinguished blood in the kingdom. The boy himself appeared later on in London, and came to the Court. He appealed

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## Nell Gwyn

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to Charles, who immediately acknowledged him and gave him the name of James de la Cloche du Bourg de Jersey. He bound him over not to reveal his parentage while Charles himself was living, and this the young James agreed to. In 1667 Charles assigned him £500 a year at the pleasure of his successor and Parliament, as long as James remained in London and continued to be a member of the Church of England. Neither of these conditions did James de la Cloche fulfil. In April of the same year he entered the Church of Rome, and apparently took refuge with the Jesuits, as papers relating the whole affair have been seen and are still to be seen in the Jesuit College in Rome. He had made his first effort to bring himself to Charles's notice in 1665. The youth must then have been twenty or twenty-one. So well did he keep his own and his father's secret that its existence was never even suspected till the discovery of the papers in the Jesuit College. Charles's generosity and kindness to him were on a par with what he extended to all his left-handed children. He was through his life of an affectionate disposition, and would give away his last farthing to those he was fond of."

Charles was not well received at the French Court, for Mazarin was anxious not to identify himself too closely with the English royalist party. He began to realize the pitiful lot of a King without a throne. He wanted to serve in the French army under the Duke of Orleans, but this was denied him. What he actually did was to plunge in a course of dissipation under the

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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able instruction of the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Percy. He went in 1648 to Holland, where he was better received, but his efforts in the following January to induce the States-General to intervene to save his father's life were unavailing. He made other attempts to avert the catastrophe. In the British Museum is preserved a blank paper with the signature "Charles P." and a seal. On the reverse side is written, in another hand: "Prince Charles, his *carte blanche* to the Parliament to save his father's head." In this document, which he dispatched to the Parliament, the Prince bade them make their own terms for his father's life, even unto taking his life instead. Charles I. was executed on January 30, 1649.

Of the adventures of Charles II. and of the various negotiations prior to the Restoration, this is not the place to speak in detail. While he was, no doubt, grateful for the loyalty of Scotland, where he was proclaimed King on February 5, 1649, he can scarcely have been grateful to his leading supporters there for the personal attitude they took up as regards him when he landed in that country. They disapproved, and with reason, of his intimate friends, and bade him dismiss them. They caused him to attend prayer meetings of inordinate length, and were not sparing of rebuke for his love of gaiety.

The period of Charles's stay in the North must have been one of unmitigated misery and humiliation for him. He was treated more like a State prisoner than a monarch, and Lord Lorne was actually placed

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## Nell Gwyn

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to spy upon his actions by day and night. His one friend and companion, whether for good or ill, was the Duke of Buckingham, who was at this time twenty-four and Charles twenty. One incident, typical alike of the King and of his Scottish environment, is referred to by Hume, the historian :

“ The King’s passion for the fair could not altogether be restrained. He had been observed using some familiarities with a young woman, and a committee of ministers was appointed to reprove him for a behaviour so unbecoming a covenanted monarch. The spokesman of the committee, one Douglas, began with a severe aspect ; informed the King that great scandal had been given to the godly ; enlarged on the heinous nature of sin, and concluded with exhorting His Majesty, whenever he was disposed to amuse himself, to be more careful for the future in shutting the windows. This delicacy, so unusual to the place and to the character of the man, was remarked by the King and he never forgot the obligation.”

The English having defeated the Scots at Dunbar, Charles formed the resolution to carry the warfare into England. At Carlisle he was again crowned King, and on September 3, 1651, his army of 12,000 men (of whom 10,000 were Scots) met Cromwell’s 30,000 in battle at Worcester and were utterly routed. When he saw how the day was going, the King did his utmost to lose his life. “ I had rather you should shoot me,” he said, “ than keep me alive to see the sad effects of this day.”

However, he was forced away from that stricken

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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field, and the thrice-told tale of his hair-breadth escapes of the next six weeks is stranger than fiction. For his preservation from capture and death he was the most indebted to Miss Jane Lane and to the Penderell and Wyndham families. A few weeks after the fugitive Charles had got safely into France again, Miss Lane arrived there accompanied by her brother, when the King greeted her with the joyful words, "Welcome, my life!" This heroic young lady afterwards married one Sir Clement Fisher, and at the Restoration, Charles settled pensions of £1,000 and £500 respectively on her and her brother, Colonel Lane. But when Lady Fisher became a widow in 1683, her pension was no less than £5,500 in arrear!

The King subsequently related to Samuel Pepys what he regarded as one of the narrowest of his escapes in 1651. Guided by the devoted Richard Penderell, he was endeavouring to cross the Severn into Wales one night, when they came to a water-mill. "Just as we came to the mill," said Charles, "we could see the miller, as I believed, sitting at the mill-door, it being a very dark night. He called out, 'Who goes there?' Upon which Richard Penderell answered, 'Neighbours going home,' or some such-like words. Whereupon the miller cried out, 'If you be neighbours, stand or I will knock you down!' Upon which (we believing there was company in the house) the fellow bade me follow him close, and he ran to a gate that went up a dirty lane up a hill, and opening the gate the miller cried out, 'Rogues, rogues!' And thereupon, some men came out of the mill after us,

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## Nell Gwyn

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which I believed were soldiers ; so Richard and I fell a-running up the lane as long as we could run, it being very deep and very dirty, till at last I bade him leap over a hedge and lie still to hear if anybody followed us ; which we did, and continued lying down upon the ground about half an hour, when, hearing nobody come, we continued our way."

For the next three years or so, Charles spent a somewhat miserable existence in France, on a small pension allowed him by Louis. During this period, the exiled monarch had to endure numerous slights. His mother would have married him to one of the Princesses of Orleans, the King's cousin, but that haughty lady would none of him ; and a proposal by Charles himself for one of Cardinal Mazarin's nieces, Hortensia, also met with a rebuff.

In June, 1654, Charles quitted Paris for Spa, where a letter-writer of the time remarked of him : " You may be assured that Charles Stuart stands absolutely for Scotland. Some about him tell him he had better hasten thither, than stay here and dance, which is his daily and nightly practice. His party come into him faster than is pleasing to him, everyone pleading poverty to get some money." And his whole income amounting to six hundred pistoles monthly, without even a carriage.

In September, 1654, he arrived in Cologne, where he was accorded a highly flattering public reception. His morals were evidently not mending, however, since at this time Lady Byron is described as " his seventeenth mistress abroad." To Henry Bennet

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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he wrote from Cologne to "get me pricked down as many new *corrants* and *farrabands*, and other little dances, as you can, and bring them with you, for I have got a small fiddler that does not play ill on the fiddle."

After a stay of some two years at Cologne, Charles and his more than ever impoverished "Court" moved on to Bruges. It was during his residence here that he was twice in imminent danger from Cromwell's machinations. The Lord Protector secretly arranged with the Dutch Government to seize the King's person on the occasion of a contemplated visit to his sister, the Princess of Orange; but this was frustrated by a faithful servant of Charles, one Fleming. A more malignant Cromwellian plot was one to lure Charles and his brothers, the Dukes of York and Gloucester, into England, and have them immediately done to death; but this was defeated by Sir Samuel Morland, an under-secretary, who by pretending to be asleep overheard Cromwell discussing the affair.

A serious charge was brought against the King while at Bruges, in a letter by one J. Butler, dated December, 1656; it is to be hoped that his information was false: "This last week, one of the richest churches in Bruges was plundered in the night. The people of Bruges are fully persuaded that Charles Stuart's followers had done it: they spare no charges to find out the guilty, and if it happen to light upon any of Charles Stuart's train, it will certainly incense that people against them. There is now a company of French comedians at Bruges, who are very punctually attended by Charles Stuart and his Court, and all the

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## Nell Gwyn

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ladies there: their most solemn day of acting is on the Lord's Day."

At least two or three noble ladies other than those already mentioned were asked in marriage by Charles, during his exile from England, without success. One of these was a daughter of the Duke of Lorraine, while another was Princess Henrietta, daughter of the Dowager Princess of Holland. "I shall," wrote the King to the latter, "in asking you a question, make it clear enough to you that I cannot have so vile a thought as to make you an instrument in my deceit. I beseech you to let me know whether your daughter the Princess Henrietta be so far engaged that you cannot receive a proposition from me concerning her; and if she be not, that you would think of a way, with all possible secrecy, I may convey my mind in that particular to you." It is right to add that Charles always considered that he was not well treated by this special object of his "affections."

After the death of Cromwell in 1658, the return of Charles to England became a more or less foregone conclusion. He left Bruges for Brussels on hearing the news, in order to have a better headquarters in the event of a sudden summons. "The necessity of affairs," writes the Count de Grammont, "had exposed Charles II. from his earliest youth to the toils and perils of a bloody war. The fate of the King his father had left him for inheritance nothing but his misfortunes and disgraces. They overtook him everywhere; but it was not until he had struggled with his ill-fortune to the last extremity that he submitted

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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to the decrees of Providence. All those who were either great on account of their birth or their loyalty had followed him into exile ; and all the young persons of the greatest distinction having afterwards joined him, composed a Court worthy of a better fate. Plenty and prosperity, which are thought to tend only to corrupt manners, found nothing to spoil in an indigent and wandering Court."

Finally, Charles, with his few faithful followers, embarked for England, on May 24, 1660, in a warship which had borne till lately the ill-omened name of the *Naseby*, now changed to the *Royal Charles*. He was met at Dover by Monk, who had brought about this Stuart Restoration, and who was at once created Duke of Albemarle. His progress from Dover to London, strewn with flowers and hailed with "perpetually-iterated Hosannas," King Charles finally ended his exile and entered his capital in triumph on his birthday, May 29th. It was "roses, roses all the way."

Nevertheless, the author of "England under the Stuarts" has to relate a characteristic episode. "Charles, alas! displayed his gratitude to Heaven for his wonderful restoration, not by prayers and thanksgiving, but by passing the night of his return with Mrs. Palmer (afterwards the celebrated Duchess of Cleveland) at the house of Sir Samuel Morland, at Lambeth." This Morland was identical with the Cromwellian under-secretary of State who had been instrumental in warning Charles in time of the Lord Protector's plot for his betrayal and assassination.

The Restoration was an accomplished fact, the King

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## Nell Gwyn

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had come into his own again, and all was sunshine after the drab reign of Puritanism.

Pepys says that Charles possessed an intimate knowledge of maritime affairs, while Sir Richard Bulstrode averred that "had this King but loved business as well as he understood it, he would have been the greatest Prince in Europe." As for his interest in the arts, and notably in literature, Horace Walpole and others have been convinced, after investigation, that Charles himself was the author of the lyric entitled "The Pleasures of Love : "

" I pass all my hours in a shady old grove,  
But I live not the day when I see not my love ;  
I survey every walk now my Phyllis is gone,  
And sigh when I think we were there all alone.  
Oh, then 'tis I think there's no Hell  
Like loving too well.

" But each shade and each conscious bower when I find,  
Where I once have been happy and she has been kind ;  
When I see the print left of her shape on the green,  
And imagine the pleasure may yet come again ;  
Oh, then 'tis I think that no joys are above  
The pleasures of love.

" While alone to myself I repeat all her charms,  
She I loved may be lock'd in another man's arms.  
She may laugh at my cares, and so false she may be  
To say all the kind things she before said to me :  
Oh, then 'tis, Oh then, that I think there's no Hell  
Like loving too well.

" But when I consider the truth of her heart,  
Such an innocent passion, so kind without art,  
I fear I have wrong'd her, and hope she may be  
So full of true love to be jealous of me.  
Oh, then 'tis I think that no joys are above  
The pleasures of love."

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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Charles was able, too ; but lazy, and neither by coaxing nor threatening could his ministers get him to devote himself seriously. Pepys mentions Killigrew's reported remonstrance to the King : " There is a good, honest, able man that I could name, that if your Majesty would employ, and command to see all things well executed, all things would soon be mended. And this is one Charles Stuart, who now spends his time in employing his lips about the Court and hath no other employment ; but if you would give him this employment, he were the fittest man in the world to perform it."

Charles was a merry fellow. All sorts of stories are told, which argue in him a pretty wit. He was too great a personage to trouble about his dignity. Dining at the Guildhall one night in 1674, when Sir Robert Viner was Lord Mayor, the host grew drunk and then more drunk, and the King, watching his opportunity, stole away to his coach. Viner, who felt that his hospitality had not yet been tested to the full, went after him and insisted upon his returning to the table and cracking yet another bottle. The King smiled and complied with his host's behest, humming to himself a line from a song of the day :

" And the man that is drunk is as great as a King."

Everyone knew the epitaph written by Rochester :

" Here lies our sovereign lord the King,  
Whose word no man relies on ;  
Who never said a foolish thing,  
And never did a wise one,"

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## Nell Gwyn

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and Charles's retort: "My discourse is my own, my actions my ministers." At least as good was his reply to the Duke of York, who told him that he ought to take more care of his person, as there were many dissatisfied persons about: "They'll never kill me, James, to put *you* on the throne."

Charles II. could never see a pretty face, a dainty figure, without he desired its possessor, and, being a King—and a King was a King in those days—he usually, if not, indeed, always, had his way. He had his passions, but it is doubtful if he was ever seriously in love. Certainly he never loved enough to confine his attentions to any one woman for any length of time, nor was he endowed with sufficient jealousy to make him angry when his mistresses bestowed their favours on others. The case was well put by his friend George Savile, Marquess of Halifax:

"It may be said that his inclinations to love were the effects of health and a good constitution, with as little mixture of the seraphic past as ever man had. And though from that foundation men often raise their passions, I am apt to think that his stayed as much as any man's ever did in the lower region. This made him like easy mistresses. They were generally resigned to him while he was abroad, with an implied bargain. Heroic, refined lovers place a good deal of their pleasure in difficulty, both for the variety of conquest and as a better earnest of their kindness.

"After the Restoration, mistresses were recommended to him, which is no small matter in a Court, and not unworthy of the thoughts even of a party.

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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A mistress, either dexterous herself or well instructed by those that are so, may be very useful to her friends, not only in the immediate hours of her ministry, but by her influence and insinuations at all times. It was resolved generally by others whom he should have in his arms, as well as whom he should have in his Councils. For a man who was capable of choosing, he chose as seldom as any man who ever lived.

“He had more property, at least in the beginning of his time, a good stomach to his mistresses than any great passion for them. His taking them from others was never learnt in a romance, and indeed fitter for a philosopher than a knight-errant. His patience for their frailties showed him no exact lover. It is a heresy, according to a true lover’s creed, even to forgive an infidelity, or the appearance of it. Love of ease will not do it where the heart is much engaged ; but where mere nature is the motive, it is possible for a man to think righter than the common opinion, and to argue that a rival taketh away nothing but the heart and leaveth all the rest.

“He had wit enough to suspect and he had wit enough not to care. The ladies got a great deal more than would have been allowed an equal bargain in Chancery for what they did for it ; but neither the manner nor the pleasure is to be judged by others.”

Thus Charles II. appeared to a shrewd contemporary who knew him well, and certainly he was no hero in what in those days was called “love.”

As a matter of fact, probably Charles II. was less careful in his *affaires*, as in politics, than cynical. He

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## Nell Gwyn

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was, indeed, the most cynical of men, and most genuinely so. It is really not surprising. In the days when Kings ruled as by Divine Right, his father had had to contend against the Parliamentary forces for nearly seven years, and then was executed by those who had fought under the banner of loyalty to their country and his. Charles II. himself led perforce a wandering, useless life, with intervals of intriguing to regain the throne that was his by descent. There are few figures more pitiable than a King without a throne or a home—though most give him contempt rather than pity.

When, at the age of thirty, he was invited to come back to his country, he returned a disillusioned young man, dissolute and rather weary. He had seen too much of the seamy side of diplomacy, and had experienced more than enough of treachery. Yet no man has ever had friends more loyal—and rewarded them less. Perhaps he took their devotion as his right, as royalty had a way of doing ; or, in his bitterness, suspected they cleaved to him because they were sure that in the end his was the winning side.

“When the King came into his own again he was thirty years of age. He was clever enough, indeed, it would not be too much to say, wise ; and he was well acquainted with the trend of affairs abroad even though he was not so well versed, or it may be interested, in domestic politics. Knowledge came as a rule easily to him, but if it did not he remained ignorant, for he had no gift of application,” Burnet wrote of him. “In his personal reasons alike with men and women

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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he had a charm that made him popular. He was graciousness itself, and would offer and promise anything—always with the mental reservation that he was bound by neither. He was, above all things, cynical. He had a very ill opinion both of men and women, and did not think there was either sincerity or chastity in the world out of principle ; but that some had either the one or the other out of humour or vanity. He thought that nobody served him out of love ; and so he was quits with all the world, and loved others as little as he thought they loved him."

Charles had a way with women, not always dependent on the attraction of his royalty. As it was, and perhaps because of this, love-making, as apart from love, became his primary, indeed, almost his only amusement. Even when he was in exile his Court at Bruges became a centre of dissoluteness. Yet much allowance must be made for him, for royalty was indeed royalty in those days, and women prostrated themselves before him. The most humorous excuse ever made for him—it would be a shame to pillory the writer—runs : " His calumniators have no conscience in their aspersions of him. He bore the discredit of much that he never performed. Judicially weighed, the number of his irregular children were smaller than the lawful contingencies of most deaneries ; considering the variety of mothers, it is truly moderate."

Much might be forgiven him if he had ever loved. That he never did so, however mistakenly, is a blot

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## Nell Gwyn

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on his character. Every generous-hearted man has at some time or other loved wisely and well, or if not wisely, anyhow well. Not so Charles. Women were to him playthings, and nothing more. He cared little or nothing for any one of his mistresses. His pride was hurt when one of them ran away from his Court and married ; but he was not unduly perturbed at the unfaithfulness of others ; the news, which in a Court where gossip and malice and all uncharitableness abounded, must have come to his ears. He regarded them, one and all, as mercenary baggages, who were his because it was made worth their while. He may have cared for others more, but it would seem as if Nell Gwyn got nearest what may be called his heart. Though she had her share of the spoils—a minor share—she was really devoted to him, which devotion he appreciated full well. What was probably more amazing to him, and possibly less appreciated, was the fact that she was faithful to him from the beginning of their connection until his death.

To follow in detail the early amours of Charles would be unedifying. Mention has been made of the earliest of his affairs of which there is any knowledge, and the only other liaison that need be noticed is that between him and Lucy Walter.

Lucy was the daughter of William Walter, of Roch Castle, near Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire ; she is believed to have been born in the same year as Charles II., in 1630. Clarendon speaks of her as "of no good fame, but handsome," and Evelyn, who saw her at Paris when she was in her twentieth



Lucy Walter



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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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year, describes her as "a brown, beautiful, bold but insipid person."

Coming to London in 1644, when the Parliamentary army had destroyed Roch Castle, she, after, we may suppose, other adventures, became the mistress of Robert Sidney, third son of the second Earl of Leicester. Sidney was then a captain or colonel of the English regiment in the Dutch service, and he took the girl with him to The Hague, where Charles II., coming on a visit, was attracted by her, and made her his mistress. She travelled about with him on the Continent, but when he left her for a while at The Hague in June, 1650, to descend upon Scotland, she at once began a liaison with Colonel Henry Bennet (afterwards Earl of Arlington). On his return, Charles, not quite so indifferent to the infidelity of his mistresses as he was when he grew older, dismissed her. He did, however, to some extent accept responsibility for her, and, in spite of the state of his exchequer, contrived to find sums of money for her support.

The rest of her life was devoted to disreputable and scandalous adventures. So bad was her conduct that Charles granted her an annuity on condition that she went back to England and lived there. It was about this time she called herself Mrs. Barlow. The document granting the annuity was found on her when, in 1656, she was arrested in London as a spy :

"CHARLES R.—Wee do by these presents of our especial grace, give and grant unto Mrs. Lucy Barlow, an annuity or yearly pension of five thousand livres,

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## Nell Gwyn

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to be paid to her or her assigns in the City of Antwerp or in such other convenient place as she shall desire, at four several payments by equal portions, the first payment to begin from the first of July 1654, and so to continue from three months to three months during her life ; with assurance to better the same, when it shall please God to restore us to our kingdoms : Given under our sign manual at our Court at Collogne this 21 day of January 1655, and in the sixth year of our Reign.

“ By His Majesties command,  
“ EDWARD NICHOLAS.”

Lucy Walter was put in the Tower, but after examination released on condition that she left the country. She went to the Netherlands, where she lived disgracefully, and died in 1658 from, as her biographer puts it on the authority of Clarendon and James II., “ a disease incidental to her manner of living.”

She had two children. The elder, James, was born at Rotterdam on April 9, 1649. Lucy attributed the paternity of the boy to Charles II., who acknowledged him, and in 1663 created him Duke of Monmouth and Buccleuch. It was, however, shrewdly suspected by many that the father was Robert Sidney, and it was said that when Monmouth grew up he much more resembled Sidney than the King. James II. stated that it was his belief that Sidney was Monmouth's father. The younger child was Mary, born at The Hague in 1651, and it is believed that the



*James, Duke of Monmouth.*



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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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father was Henry Bennet. The girl married William Sarsfield, elder brother of Patrick, Earl of Lucan, and the year after his death, in 1676, William Fanshawe, Master of Requests.

The Duke of Monmouth was a tragic figure. He was the one illegitimate child of Charles II. who resented the fact that he was not born in wedlock. It certainly was not a question of morality for its own sake, it is doubtful if it had anything to do with his mother's dishonour; it was simply that the bar sinister put him outside the succession to the throne. He was always supported in his ambition to be recognized as heir to the throne by many of the leaders of the Protestant party, who objected to James II. as a member of the Church of Rome. It was this that ultimately cost Monmouth his life.

Monmouth was on his mother's death entrusted to the care of Lord Crofts, and, known as James Crofts, passed as a relative of his guardian. In 1663, when he was fourteen, he was brought to Charles at Hampton Court, who was delighted with his good looks, charm and impudence. He acknowledged him as his son and created him Baron Tyndale, Earl of Doncaster and Duke of Monmouth, and invested him with the Order of the Garter. He took his seat in the House of Lords in April, 1663. In that same month, both of the parties being mere children, he was married to the wealthiest heiress in the kingdom, Lady Anne Scott, daughter of the second Earl Buccleuch. She had succeeded her elder sister in the title in 1661, when she was ten years of age. Monmouth assumed the name

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## Nell Gwyn

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of Scott before his marriage, and on the day of the marriage he and his bride were jointly created Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, Earl and Countess of Dalkeith, and Baron and Baroness Scott of Whitechester and Eskdale in Scotland. The marriage ceremony took place in the King's Chamber at Whitehall, and Charles wrote to his sister, the Duchess of Orleans : " This being James's marriage day, I am going to sup with them, where we intend to dance and see them abed together."

" The universal terror of lovers and husbands," as De Grammont described Monmouth, plunged wildly into the gaieties of the Court and the town. Both Pepys and Evelyn in their respective Diaries for February, 1665, make reference to a gorgeous Masque at Court in which Monmouth participated with five other gallants and six " ladies." Says Evelyn : " There were six women (my Lady Castlemayne and Duchesse of Monmouth being two of them) and six men (the Duke of Monmouth and Lord Arran and Monsieur Blanfort being three of them) in vizards, but most rich and antique dresses, did dance admirably and gloriously. God give us cause to continue the mirth ! "

Pepys, writing while Monmouth was still in his teens, says that the young Duke and his boon companions seemed to find little occupation " but to debauch the country women." This was no exaggeration ; it is certain that at one time a remarkable document was drawn up for the King's signature, granting " Our gracious pardon unto our dear sonne

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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James, Duke of Monmouth, of all Murders, Homiciders, and Felonyes, whatsoever at any time before ye 28th day of February last past, committed either by himselfe alone or together with any other person or persons." Monmouth is known to have been engaged in the murder of a London beadle in 1671, while the attack upon and maiming of Sir John Coventry, for having alluded in the House of Commons to the King's mistresses, is also easily traceable to him.

It has been said, too, that the prolonged animosity between him and his uncle, the Duke of York, originated in their mutual "affection" for Mary (Moll) Kirke, maid-of-honour to the Duchess of York. Monmouth found that Lord Mulgrave was also paying clandestine visits to Miss Kirke, and had him arrested by the guard. The Duke of York, thereupon, had Mulgrave dismissed from his command, when the latter informed the former that Monmouth was also his rival !

Monmouth in 1668 was appointed captain of the King's Guard, and two years later was promoted captain-general of the forces. He served against the Dutch in 1672 and 1673, and in 1678 against the French at Ostend and Mons. Monmouth in 1679 quelled the insurrection that followed on the murder of Archbishop Sharpe and defeated the rebels at the battle of Bothwell Bridge. For this victory and for his clemency afterwards he won much popular applause.

On his return to London he associated himself very intimately with the Protestant succession, with the result that he came into open conflict with the Duke of York. As a result of this, the King told him to

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## Neill Gwyn

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absent himself from Court for a while. A letter from the Duchess of Portsmouth to Monmouth has been preserved :

" Had you not all this time lived very coldly and unfriendly to me, I would have made you the greatest man in England next ye Duke of York, for I am sure I have some credit with the King, as you may see by what I have done for my Lord Sunderland, whom the King never had a good opinion of till I recommend'd him. . . . The King hath always promis'd me, and I hope he will keep his word and be as true to me as I have been to him ever since I gave myself to him, that nobody shall come into Court or preferment without they be those that are my friends—and those that will not, I will not—I am resolved to shut the door against them. I thank God I have a good conscience and fear nothing—the King of England loves me—the King of France has promised to support me."

Monmouth went to Holland, but returned almost immediately, when he was deprived of all his offices. His personal popularity was so great that more than one suggestion was made to the King to declare his son's legitimacy. " Much as I love him," said Charles, " I would rather see him hanged at Tyburn than admit him to be my heir."

There was circulated persistently a legend that Charles had actually married Lucy Walter, and that proofs of the marriage were in existence. So persistent were these rumours that the King in 1678 caused to be published a statement " that, to avoid any dispute which might happen in time to come concerning

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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the succession to the Crown, he did declare, in the presence of Almighty God, that he never gave, or made any contract of marriage, nor was married to Mrs. Barber, *alias* Walters, the Duke of Monmouth's mother, nor to any other woman whatsoever, but to his present wife, Queen Catherine, now living."

On his return from Holland in 1680 Monmouth toured through the west country, which resembled nothing so much as a royal procession. He committed all sorts of follies. He even touched for the King's Evil. He then was associated with Lord William Russell and Algernon Sidney in the Rye House Plot, which was a plot to secure the succession of the Duke of Monmouth to the throne in preference to his uncle of York. It was believed that some of the more extreme conspirators projected the assassination of the King and his brother, and that the design was only frustrated by the royal residence at Newmarket taking fire, and so sending the party away some days before the date arranged for the consummation of the plot. Russell and Sidney were convicted. Monmouth, who went into hiding, certainly was privy to both schemes, but it may be that, so far as regards the proposed murders, he only remained in the conspiracy to frustrate it. Anyhow, it is said in Monmouth's favour that when Russell was convicted he offered to give himself up if he could thereby secure remission of the capital sentence.

Monmouth was suspected of having sought refuge with his mistress, Eleanor Needham, the youngest daughter of Sir Robert Needham, Bart., and younger

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## Nell Gwyn

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sister of the beautiful and notorious Mrs. Middleton, whose gallantries have been recorded by De Grammont. He presently gave himself up and was pardoned by the King ; but he became so involved in other and equally unsuccessful plots that at last, in 1684, he thought it wise to fly the country.

He went to Belgium, where he was joined by Lady Wentworth, who had for some time past been enamoured of him. They lived together at Brussels, where the Governor, the Marquis de Grana, asked Monmouth whether the lady was his wife. The answer being in the affirmative, the Marquis sent his daughter to call on her, but, on learning the truth, informed Monmouth, if he were no longer in office, he would " cut the Duke's throat or the Duke should cut his " for the implied insult.

As will be seen by the following letter to England from Skelton, then British Envoy at Hamburg, this affair with Lady Henrietta rapidly assumed the dimensions of a scandal :

" I am very much troubled to understand that the Lady Henrietta Wentworth is soe dangerously sick, but am much more concerned that the Duke of Monmouth takes such care of her, and thinke it were better she should dye than bring a scandall upon her selfe by his too frequent visits, for though she be never so innocent, she must necessarily suffer thereby in the opinion of the world. When she is able to undertake a journey, I wish you could prevayle with her to come hither, since it cannot but be farre more for her credit than to remain where she is. But I did not take any

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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notice of anything relating to the Duke of Monmouth, neither would I have you to doe it, for that is too tender a string to be touch't upon, if a lady be innocent, as I hope in God she is, though I must confesse that I approve not of her conduct and much lesse of her mothers who humours her in it. Pray be so kinde as to write freely to me of all that is say'd of her, and how she carrys herself, which I shall make noe ill use of, or expose to the view of any creature living."

Later in the year Lady Wentworth returned to England, but only for a while. She and Monmouth were fêted at The Hague by the Prince and Princess of Orange at the end of 1684—greatly to the disgust of the Duke of York, who was furious that his nephew, "who had shown such animosity towards him, should be admitted into the closest intimacy with his own son-in-law."

After the death of Charles II., James II. compelled his nephew's expulsion from The Hague and from Brussels. "Twenty-four hours were allowed for his departure," says Mr. Fea, "and as a special favour Lady Wentworth was given two or three days' grace. The latter repaired to Antwerp, escorted by Don Valera, a Spanish officer of her acquaintance who had lived much in England. Upon their arrival, her chaperon gave a ball in her honour. The guests had duly assembled, and the music was striking up when a mysterious note was slipped into Lady Wentworth's hand. Begging to be excused for a moment, she quitted the room, but to everyone's astonishment did not return."

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The explanation was that Monmouth was in hiding in the vicinity, and the lovers fled that night to the little town of Gouda. Here they appear to have remained for a few weeks, incognito and in absolute seclusion. In the following lines, written at this time, the Duke is supposed to have expressed his satisfaction at being cut off from the outer world :

“ With joy we leave thee,  
False world, and do forgive  
All thy false treachery,  
For now we'll happy live.  
We'll to our bowers  
And there spend our hours.  
Happy there we'll be,  
We no strifes can see :  
No quarrelling for crowns  
Nor slavery of State,  
Nor changes in our fate.  
From plots this place is free,  
There we'll ever be.  
We'll sit and bless our stars  
That from the noise of wars  
Did this glorious place give,  
That thus we happy live.”

It would have been well for Monmouth if he had been content to refrain from “ quarrelling for crowns ! ” But he permitted himself to be persuaded into an attempt to wrest the throne of England from his uncle, James II. A sum of about £6,000 was realized by the pawning of Monmouth's own valuables and of Lady Wentworth's and her mother's jewellery, exactly £2,733 being raised on the latter. Two or three small vessels having been chartered, the little expedition stood out

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## Charles II., Lucy Walter and Monmouth

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from the Texel, and "King Monmouth" landed at Lyme Regis, Dorset, on June 11, 1685. The rest of the story is well known. It ended at Sedgemoor on July 6. Nine days later Monmouth was executed in the Tower. Even at the last moment he refused to admit regret for his connection with Lady Wentworth, and in the circumstances the clergy refused to administer the sacrament to him. He was greatly devoted to this lady, and on the scaffold said: "I have had a scandal raised upon me about a woman, a lady of virtue and honour. I will name her—the Lady Henrietta Wentworth. I declare that she is a very virtuous and godly woman. I have committed no sin with her, and that which hath passed between us was very honest and innocent in the sight of God."

Dryden wrote a kindly epitaph, in which he said :

"Unblamed of life, ambition set aside,  
Not stained with cruelty, not puffed with pride ;  
How happy had he been, if destiny  
Had higher placed his birth, or not so high !  
His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne,  
And blest all other countries but his own :  
But charming greatness since so few refuse,  
'Tis juster to lament him than accuse."

## CHAPTER X

### LADY CASTLEMAINE

The King's many loves.—Barbara Villiers.—Frances Teresa Stuart.—Nell Gwyn.—Louise de K roualle.—Hortense Mancini.—The birth of Barbara Villiers.—Her family.—Her beauty.—Becomes a "toast."—Her early amours.—Philip Stanhope, second Earl of Chesterfield.—His correspondence with Barbara Villiers.—Barbara marries Roger Palmer.—She continues her *liaison* with Chesterfield.—Goes with her husband to Holland.—She attracts the King.—At the Restoration becomes his mistress.—Her bad qualities.—The paternity of her daughter, Anne, in dispute.—Ultimately acknowledged by Charles II.—Palmer is created Earl of Castlemaine.—Lady Castlemaine's second child.—Her outrageous behaviour.—The King with her on the night of his consort's arrival in England.

THE list of the many beautiful women who attracted the notice of Charles II. is extensive. There were innumerable fleeting *liaisons*, passions of a day and night, or maybe a week, which can be ignored. The outstanding figures in his Book of Love are Barbara Villiers, afterwards Countess of Castlemaine and subsequently Duchess of Cleveland; Frances Teresa Stuart, generally known as "La Belle Stuart," who married the third Duke of Richmond; Nell Gwyn; Louise de K roualle, created Duchess of Portsmouth; and Hortense Mancini, who was the wife of the Duke Mazarin.

Barbara Villiers, who was born in the autumn of 1641, was the daughter of William Villiers, second Viscount Grandison, and Mary, third daughter of

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## Lady Castlemaine

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Paul Bayning, first Viscount Bayning. The scandalous story, printed in the "Secret History of Charles II.," which was published in 1690, that Barbara was the child of Queen Henrietta Maria and the Earl of St. Albans had no foundation in fact. Her father, who fought for the royalists, was mortally wounded at the siege of Bristol in 1643. Five years later, her mother married again, the second husband being Charles Villiers, second Earl of Anglesey.

Barbara Villiers came to live with her step-father and mother at their London house in 1656, when she was in her fifteenth year. She was very lovely, all the chroniclers agree. Her features were perfect, her figure exquisite; she had beautiful blue eyes and charming brown hair. She was from her first appearance in society surrounded by the gallants of the day, and it is generally accepted that at this early age she had several amorous adventures.

"This afternoon," Pepys noted on October 21, 1666, "walking with Sir W. Cholmley he told me, among many other things, how Harry Killegrew is banished from the Court for saying that my Lady Castlemaine was a lecherous little girl when she was young. That she complained to the King, and he sent to the Duke of York, whose servant he is, to turn him away. The Duke of York has done it, but takes it ill of the Lady. She attended to excuse herself, but ill blood is made."

Chief among the lovers of Barbara Villiers was Philip Stanhope, second Earl of Chesterfield, who had succeeded his grandfather in the title in 1656, when he was twenty-two years of age. At nineteen he had

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## Nell Gwyn

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married Anne Percy, eldest daughter of the tenth Earl of Northumberland, and lived with her quietly at Petworth, but he was left a widower before he came of age. He could, therefore, have married Barbara had he desired to do so, but evidently he did not; nor, perhaps, much as she was attracted by him, did she, who even then knew her world, desire to convert her lover into a husband.

Grammont has described Chesterfield: "*Il avait le visage fort agréable, la tête assez belle, peu de taille, et moins de l'air.*" He was one of the wildest of the roués of the day, and was notorious for his excess in drink and gaming, as well as for the variety of his love affairs. Among his conquests, besides Barbara, was the Lady Elizabeth Howard who subsequently married Dryden.

Chesterfield was an ardent royalist, and in 1659 he was committed by the Protector to the Tower on suspicion of being concerned in Sir George Booth's rising. He had a year earlier been sent to the Tower for wounding Captain John Whalley in a duel; and in January, 1660, in another duel he killed a man called Woolley, whereupon, to escape the consequences, he fled to France. He was pardoned by Charles II., and at the Restoration returned in the King's suite. He was Chamberlain to Catherine of Braganza from 1662 until 1665, when he resigned his post but remained a member of her Council. It is to his credit that he remained loyal to James II. and declined the offers of William III. to make him a Privy Councillor, a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, and, even, an Am-

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## Lady Castlemaine

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bassador. Professor Firth tells us that, "To William himself, Chesterfield explained his aversion to all such oaths, saying that if the oath of allegiance [to James II.] which he had taken could not bend him, nothing could, and protesting his veneration for his Majesty's person and his resolution not to act against the Government." Even as Chesterfield refused to take the association in support of William's title imposed by Parliament in 1694, so, at the accession of Anne, he was one of those who refused to take the oath abjuring the Pretender.

Chesterfield's loyalty to James II. was the more praiseworthy, because James, when Duke of York, had paid very marked attentions to the Earl's second wife, Lady Elizabeth Butler, eldest daughter of James Butler, twelfth Earl and first Duke of Ormonde, whom he married in 1660. There is mention of this incident in Pepys's Diary on January 19, 1663 :

"This day by Dr. Clerke I was told the occasion of my Lord Chesterfield's going and taking his lady, my Lord Ormond's daughter, from Court. It seems, he not only hath long been jealous of the Duke of York, but did find them two talking together, though there were others in the room, and the lady, in all opinion, a most good, virtuous woman. He, the next day, of which the Duke was warned by somebody that saw the passion my Lord Chesterfield was in the night before, went and told the Duke how much he did apprehend himself wronged, in his picking out his lady of the whole Court to be the subject of his dishonour ; which the Duke did answer with great calmness, not

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## Nell Gwyn

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seeming to understand the reason of complaint, and that was all that passed ; but my Lord did presently pack his lady into the country in Derbyshire, near the Peak [to his country seat, Bretby Hall] ; which is become a proverb at Court, to send a man's wife to the Peak when she vexes him."

Some of the correspondence between Chesterfield and Barbara Villiers has been preserved. It was written in 1657, when Barbara was sixteen years old :

### FROM BARBARA VILLIERS TO THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD.

"MY LORD,

"The joy I had of being with you the last night, has made me do nothing but dream of you, and my life is never pleasant to mee but when I am with you or talking of you ; yet the discourses of the world must make mee a little more circumspect ; therefore I deseir you not to come to-morrow, but to stay till the party be come to town. I will not faile to meet you on Sathurday morning, till when I remaine your humble servant."

### FROM BARBARA VILLIERS TO THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD, AT TUNBRIDGE.

"MY LORD,

"I came just now from the Dutches of Hambleton, and there I found to my great affliction, that Lady Ann was sent to Windsor, and the world sayes that you are the occation of it. I am sorry to hear that the having a kindness for you is so great a

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## Lady Castlemaine

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crime that people are to suffer for it ; the only satisfaction that one doth receive is, that their cause is so glorious that it is sufficient to preserve a tranquillity of mind, that all their mallice can never discompose. I see that the fates were resolved to make mee happier than I could expect, for when I came home I found a letter that came from your lordship, which makes mee beleive that amongst the pleasures you receive in the place where you are, which I hear affords great plenty of fine ladyes, you sometimes think of her who is,

“ My Lord,

“ Yours, etc.”

### FROM BARBARA VILLIERS TO THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD.

“ MY LORD,

“ I would fain have had the happyness to have seen you at church this day, but I was not allowed to goe. I am never so well pleased as when I am with you ; though I feel you are better when you are with some other ladyes ; for you were yesterday all the afternoon with the person I am most jealous of, and I know I have so little merrit that I am suspicious you love all women better than my selfe. I sent you yesterday a letter that I think might convince you that I loved nothing besides your selfe, nor will I ever, though you should hate mee ; but if you should, I would never give you the trouble of telling you how much I loved you, but keep it to

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## Nell Gwyn

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me selfe till I had broke my harte. I will importune you no longer than to say, that I am, and ever will be your constant faithfull humble servant."

FROM THE LADY ANNE HAMILTON AND BARBARA VILLIERS TO THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD.

" My LORD,

" My freind and I are just now abed together a contriving how to have your company this afternune. If you deserve this favour, you will come and seek us at Ludgate Hill, about three a clock at Butler's shop, where we will expect you : but least we should . . .

" Yours, etc."

FROM BARBARA VILLIERS TO THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD.

" My LORD,

" I doe highly regret my own misfortune of being out of town since it made mee incapable of the honour you intended mee. I assure you nothing is likelier to make mee sett high rate of my selfe, than the esteem you are pleased to say you have for mee. You cannot bestow your favours and oblugations on any that has a more patient resentment of them ; nor can they ever of any receive a more sincere reception than from

" My Lord,  
" Yours."

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## Lady Castlemaine

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THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD TO BARBARA VILLIERS.

"MADAM,

"Though I have hardly ended one letter, I am forced to begin a nother, since mee thinks that the first was so full of business, that there wanted roome to express the kindness that should shine in all my actions ; but could I set down all I think upon that subject, all the paper of the town (though to much to send you) were to little to doc it ; for having an object so transcending all that ever was before, it coins new thoughts, which want fresh words, to speak the language of a soul that might justly teach all others how to love. I am

"Madam,

"Yours, etc."

THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD TO BARBARA VILLIERS.

"MADAM,

"I need not tell your ladyship how unfortunate I was in missing the opportunity of wating on you when you were last in town ; since you have reason to believe, that the paying you my respects and your acceptance of same are both the ambition and pleasure of my life. I hope this letter will be so fotunate as to kiss your hands, and yet I envy it a happyness I want my selfe ; but how ever my ill luck hath devided mee from that place which is made happy by your presence : I beseech you to beleive that though my joyes may languish yet my passion shall last in its primitive vigour, and preserves me ever

"Madam,

"Your, etc."

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## Nell Gwyn

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It was expected that Barbara Villiers, with her striking beauty, her charm, and her audacity, would make a great match. To the general surprise, her choice fell upon a young man of no particular distinction, Roger Palmer. Palmer, who was born in 1634, was the eldest son of Sir James Palmer, of Hayes, in Middlesex, who had been Chancellor of the Order of the Garter. He had entered himself as a student at the Inner Temple, but never had himself called to the bar. The marriage, which took place on April 14, 1659, was not a success. If Barbara married Palmer out of pique, as seems not unlikely, to avenge herself for a slight put upon her by Chesterfield, she clearly did not contrive to forget her lover, and the *liaison* was shortly renewed, if, indeed, it ever lapsed. Anyhow, the following letters were written to Chesterfield in the year she was married :

“It is my ill fortune to be disappointed of what I most desire, for this afternoon I did promise myself the satisfaction of your company ; but I fear I am disappointed, which is no small affliction to me ; but I hope the Fates may yet be so kind as to let me see you about five o’clock. If you will be at your private lodgings in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, I will endeavour to come.”

Even on a sick-bed, recovering from an attack of smallpox, Barbara gathered strength enough to write a passionate love-letter :

“My dear Life, I have been this day extremely ill, and the not hearing from you has made me much worse than otherwise I should have been. The doctor

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## Lady Castlemaine

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does believe me in a desperate condition, and I must confess the unwillingness I have to leave you makes me not entertain the thoughts of death so willingly as otherwise I should. For there is nothing besides yourself that could make me so desire to live a day, and if I am never so happy as to see you more, yet the last words I will say shall be a prayer for your happiness, and so I will live and die loving you above all other things."

The love-lorn lady recovered, the illness having happily spared her beauty. Her husband took her to Holland in the autumn of 1659, where they joined the Court of Charles II. There she attracted the attention of the King, and it is believed that she almost at once became his mistress.

At the Restoration the Palmers returned to England, whether in the suite of the King or not is unknown. At once Barbara became one of the most important personages in the kingdom. She had at this time more than anyone else the ear of Charles, and did not scruple to use her influence.

The King was undoubtedly enamoured of her, but it is almost certain that she did not care for him. As Burnet wrote: "His passion for her, and her strange behaviour towards him, did so disorder him, that often he was not master of himself, nor capable of minding business. . . . She was a woman of great beauty, but most enormously vicious and ravenous, foolish but imperious, and always carrying on intrigues with other men, while yet she pretended she was jealous of him."

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## Nell Gwyn

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On February 25, 1661, she was delivered of a child, Anne. Her husband claimed the paternity of the girl ; but it was generally thought that the father was Chesterfield, and it has been stated that when Anne grew up she greatly resembled him. Anyhow, Barbara, who always had her eye on the main chance, contrived to persuade the King that Anne was his child, and Charles, whether he believed it or not, accepted the paternity and in 1673 by a royal warrant publicly announced that Anne was his natural child.

The King had been urged to marry so as to secure the succession, and negotiations were eventually set in train for the hand of Catherine of Braganza. It may safely be assumed that this did not suit the book of Barbara Palmer, and many an uncomfortable quarter of an hour Charles must have had with his overbearing mistress. It was probably to placate her to some degree that he decided to raise her husband to the peerage.

There was, however, a hitch. Clarendon hated the lady, deplored her influence, resented her making her house the rendezvous of his political opponents—Ashley, Bennet, Buckingham and Lauderdale met regularly there—and absolutely refused to pass the patents of nobility. From this decision nothing would move him, not even the orders of the King. In the end Charles had to own himself defeated, and Barbara Palmer, or rather her husband, had to content herself with an Irish title.

“To the Privy Seal, and sealed there,” Pepys wrote on December 7, 1661 ; “and, among other things that

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## Lady Castlemaine

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passed, there was a patent for Roger Palmer, Madame Palmer's husband, to be Earl of Castlemaine and Baron of Limbricke in Ireland ; but the honour is tied up to the males got of the body of this wife, the Lady Barbara : the reason whereof everyone knows."

It is something to Palmer's credit that he was averse to accepting this grant of honours. As a matter of fact, he never took his seat in the Irish Parliament.

The relations between Lady Castlemaine and Charles continued, and she was again with child when Catherine of Braganza landed in England to marry the King. "My Lady told me," Pepys has recorded on May 10, 1662, "how my Lady Castlemaine do speak of going to lie in at Hampton Court, which she and all our ladies are much troubled at, because of the King being forced to show her countenance in the sight of the Queen when she comes." This was too much even for the easy-going Charles to countenance, and the child, which arrived early in the following June, was born in the Countess's house in King Street, Westminster.

However, if adamant in this matter, Charles was certainly not desirous to break with his mistress until the very moment of his marriage, and was with her on the night of the arrival of his bride in England :

"In the Privy Garden saw the finest smocks and linen petticoats of my Lady Castlemaine's, laced with rich lace at the bottom, that ever I saw, and did me good to look at them," Pepys noted. "Sarah [Lord Sandwich's housekeeper] told me how the King dined at my Lady Castlemaine's, and supped, every day

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## Nell Gwyn

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and night the last week ; and that the night that the bonfires were made for joy of the Queen's arrival, the King was there ; but there was no fire at her door, though at all the rest of the doors almost in the street ; which was much observed ; and that the King and she did send for a pair of scales and weighed one another ; and she, being with child, was said to be the heaviest. But she is now a most disconsolate creature, and comes not out of doors, since the King's going. But we went to the theatre to see *The French Dancing Master*, and there with much pleasure we saw and gazed upon Lady Castlemaine ; but it troubles us to see her look dejectedly, and slighted by people already."

## CHAPTER XI

### CATHERINE OF BRAGANZA

The choice of a Queen.—Catherine of Braganza selected.—Her dowry.—Her arrival in England.—The royal marriage.—Her appearance.—Charles at first attracted by her.—His pleasure in her short-lived.—He devotes himself again to Lady Castlemaine.—A Court Ball.—The King and Queen quarrel over Lady Castlemaine.—Lady Castlemaine a Lady of the Queen's Bedchamber.—Lady Castlemaine leaves her husband.—Lord Clarendon.—Court frolics.—The desire for a direct heir to the throne.—Edward Montague.—The dullness of the Queen's life.—Her tea-parties.—Her lack of interest in politics.—Her devotion to her religion.

CHARLES was now being persuaded to marry, but he seems to have had no desire to do so. However, ministers urged upon him the necessity of providing for the direct succession to the throne, and ultimately he gave way. Princess after princess was considered, but, said Charles in 1661: "Odd's fish! I could not marry one of them—they are all *foggy*." The dowry was a matter of moment, and the eligible princesses were far from wealthy. There was one exception, however, and this was Catherine of Braganza.

Catherine, who was born in November, 1638, was the third child of John, Duke of Braganza, and Louisa de Guzman, a daughter of the Duke of Medina Sidonia. The Duke became King of Portugal in 1640, and after his death sixteen years later, Catherine's younger

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## Nell Gwyn

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brother, Alfonso, succeeded to the throne, Queen Louisa being appointed Regent during his minority.

It had always been the desire of King John to strengthen his monarchy by a direct alliance with England, such as would be secured by a marriage between the two royal houses. Even so early as 1645, he had thought of a marriage between his daughter and Charles, Prince of Wales ; but though the matter was discussed, nothing came of the project at the time.

Early in 1661 negotiations were opened as regards the marriage, and these were brought to a successful conclusion. Parliament was advised of this in May. In the next month the marriage treaty was signed. The dowry of the bride was magnificent : half a million sterling, the settlement of Bombay in India and Tangier in Northern Africa, and a share in the enormous overseas trade of Portugal.

The Earl of Sandwich was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary to Portugal, and sailed for Lisbon to bring the bride to England. He did not, however, return with her for nearly a year, during which time he took possession of Tangier. Of other difficulties that arose, there is mention in Pepys : " My Lord was forced to have some clashing with the Council of Portugal about payment of the portion before he could get it ; which was, besides Tangier and a free trade in the Indies, two millions of crowns, half now and the other half in twelve months. But they have brought but little money ; but the rest in sugars and other commodities and bills of exchange." Catherine was

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## Catherine of Braganza

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regarded in Portugal as Queen of England, but, as a matter of fact, she was not married by proxy, as was then the usual custom, as the Pope, who disapproved of a Roman Catholic Princess marrying a Protestant King, would not grant the necessary dispensation.

The Duke of York, on behalf of the King, met the bride-elect at Portsmouth on May 13, 1662. Charles did not go to Portsmouth until a week later, pleading the pressure of state business, but actually being in no hurry to get away from Lady Castlemaine. The voyage had greatly upset Catherine, who did not create a favourable impression on board. Pepys noted " that the Queen hath given no rewards to any of the captains or officers, but only to my Lord Sandwich, and that was a bag of gold, which was no honourable present, of about £1,400 sterling. How recluse the Queen hath ever been, and all the voyage never come upon the deck, nor put her head out of her cabin, but did love my Lord's music, and would send for it down to the state-room, and she sit in her cabin within hearing of it."

It is stated in the Duke of York's journal that " the King went thither (Portsmouth) and was married privately by Lord Aubigny, a secular priest, according to the rites of Rome, in the Queen's chamber ; none present but the Portuguese Ambassador, three more Portuguese of quality, and two or three Portuguese women. What made this necessary was, that the Earl of Sandwich did not marry Catherine by proxy as usual, before she came away. How this happened the Duke knows not, nor did the Chancellor (Clarendon)

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## Nell Gwyn

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know of this private marriage. The Queen would not be bedded till pronounced man and wife by Sheldon, Bishop of London."

A more piquant account is given by Charles himself (who, however, is said to have remarked that at first sight he "thought they had brought him a *bat* instead of a woman ") in a letter from Portsmouth to Lord Clarendon dated May 21: "I arrived here yesterday about two in the afternoon, and as soon as I had shifted myself, I went into my wife's chamber, whom I found in bed by reason of a little cough and some inclination to a fever. I can now give you an account of what I have seen, which in short is: her face is not so exact as to be called a beauty, though her eyes are excellent good, and not anything in her face that can in the least degree shame one; on the contrary, she hath as much agreeableness in her looks as ever I saw, and if I have any skill in physiognomy, which I think I have, she must be as good a woman as ever was born. Her conversation, as much as I can perceive, is very good, for she has wit enough and a most agreeable voice. You will wonder to see how well we are acquainted already; in a word I think myself very happy, for I am confident our too humours will agree very well together."

Another letter, written at this time by Charles to Clarendon, has been preserved:

"My brother will tell you of all that passes here, which I hope will be to your satisfaction; I am sure 'tis much to mine, that I cannot easily tell you how happy I think myself, and *I must be the worst man living*



The arrival of Catherine of Braganza at Portsmouth



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## Catherine of Braganza

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(which I hope I am not) if I be not a good husband. I am confident never two humours were better fitted together than ours are. We cannot start from hence till Tuesday, by reason that there are not carts to be had to-morrow to transport all our *garde-infantas*, without which there is no stirring; so you are not to expect me till Thursday night at Hampton Court."

The royal honeymoon was passed at Hampton Court, when "she and Charles talked in Spanish entirely, as she did not know enough French to converse in that tongue." The praise lavished upon Catherine's eyes by Charles was echoed by Pepys and by the Court poet, Waller, the latter remarking, in lines "On a card that Her Majesty tore at ombre,"

"The cards you tear in value rise;  
So do the wounded by your eyes;  
Who to celestial things aspire  
Are by that passion raised the higher."

It really seemed at first as if the marriage would turn out well. Charles seems to have been in a good humour about it, even though he was disappointed that more money was not forthcoming. Catherine was not, of course, to be compared in looks with Lady Castlemaine, nor some other beauties of the Court; but she had a low pleasing voice, fine hair, and was, as Pepys put it, "though not overcharming, she hath a good, modest and innocent look that was pleasing."

The pleasure of the King in his consort was, however, short-lived. "The new and brilliant scenes in which the convent-bred queen was now required to play the

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## Nell Gwyn

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leading part were at first strange and fatiguing to her, and she took far more delight in the practice of her devotional exercises than in all the seductive gaities which surrounded her," Miss Strickland has written. "She heard mass daily, and but for the earnest persuasions of the ambassador, who, it will be remembered, was her god-father, she would have spent more time in her chapel than was at all compatible with her duties as a wife and a queen. It required all the influence of this prudent counsellor to induce her to go into public as often as she was required, or to tolerate the freedom of manners in that dissipated court, where infidelity and licentiousness walked openly unveiled. Catharine was wedded to the most witty and fascinating prince in the world, constitutionally good-humoured, but without religion or moral principles, brave, reckless and devoted to pleasure, and requiring constant excitement and frequent changes. The simplicity of this young queen's character, her freshness, innocence and confiding fondness for himself, pleased him, the *naïveté* of her manners amused him, and, as a new toy, she was prized and cherished for the first six weeks of their marriage. Nothing in fact could exceed the lover-like devotion of his behaviour to his royal bride for that period, which was spent in all sorts of pleasures and amusements that he could devise for her entertainment. Sylvan sports, excursions in the fields, the parks, or on the Thames, occupied the court by day, while the evenings were devoted to comedies, music, and balls, in which the King, his brother, and the lords and ladies joined, the

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## Catherine of Braganza

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King excelling them all in the air and grace of his dancing, while the queen applauded, to his great delight, while he continued to treat her with every possible demonstration of tenderness and respect."

This was all very well for a time, but Catherine had not the qualities to hold such a wayward spirit as the King. She had no conversation, certainly no wit or any sense of humour; she was entirely ignorant of affairs of state, and was unused to society. The amusements of the Court, however, delighted her. She was fond of dancing, though a poor performer; and was an inveterate gambler, playing for higher stakes than was customary in those days.

Gaming was a very definite institution at Court. Charles himself was indifferent to cards, but nearly everyone else seems to have loved them. There are numerous references to gaming in Pepys, one or two of which may be quoted.

"*February 7, 1661.*—Among others, Mr. Creed and Captain Ferrers tell me the stories of my Lord Duke of Buckingham's and my Lord's falling out at Havre de Grace, at cards; they two and my Lord St. Alban's playing. The Duke did, to my Lord's dishonour, often say that he did in his conscience know the contrary to what he then said, about the difference at cards; and so did take up the money that he should have lost to my Lord. Which my Lord resenting, said nothing then, but that he doubted not but there were ways enough to get his money of him. So they parted that night; and my Lord

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## Nell Gwyn

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sent for Sir R. Stayner and sent him the next morning to the Duke to know whether he did remember what he said last night, and whether he would own it with his sword and a second ; which he said he would, and so both sides agreed. But my Lord St. Alban's, and the Queen and Ambassador Montagu did way-lay them at their lodgings till the difference was made up, to my Lord's honour, who hath got great reputation thereby."

" *February 17, 1667.*—This evening going to the Queen's side to see the ladies, I did find the Queene, the Duchess of York, and another or two at cards, with the room full of great ladies and men ; which I was amazed to see on a Sunday, having not believed it ; but contrarily, flatly denied the same a little while since to my cozen Roger Pepys."

" *January 1, 1668.*—By and by I met with Mr. Brisband ; and having it in my mind this Christmas to (do what I never can remember that I did) go and see the manner of the gaming at the Groome-Porter's, I having in my coming from the playhouse stepped into two Temple-halls, and there saw the dirty 'prentices and idle people playing ; wherein I was mistaken, in thinking to have seen gentlemen of quality playing there, as I think it was when I was a little child, that one of my father's servants, John Bassum, I think, carried me in his arms thither. I did tell Brisband of it, and he did lead me thither, where after staying an hour, they begun to play at about eight at night, where to see how differently

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## Catherine of Braganza

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one man took his losing from another, one cursing and swearing, and another only muttering and grumbling to himself, a third without any apparent discontent at all : to see how the dice will run good luck in one hand, for half an hour together, and another have no good luck at all : to see how easily here, where they play nothing but guinnys, a £100 is won or lost : to see two or three gentlemen come in there drunk, and putting their stock of gold together, one 22 pieces, the second 4, and the third 5 pieces ; and these to play one with another, and forget how much each of them brought, but he that brought the 22 thinks that he brought no more than the rest : to see the different humours of the gamesters to change their luck, when it is bad, how ceremonious they are to call for new dice, to shift their places, to alter their manner of throwing, and that with great industry, as if there was anything in it : to see how some old gamesters, that have no money now to spend as formerly, do come and sit and look on, as among others Sir Lewis Dines, who was here, and hath been a great gamester in his time : to hear their cursing and damning to no purpose, as one man being to throw a seven if he could, and failing to do it after a great many throws, cried he would be damned if ever he flung seven more while he lived, his despair of throwing it being so great, while others did it as their luck served almost every throw : to see how persons of the best quality do here sit down and play with people of any, though meaner : and to see how people in ordinary clothes shall come

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## Nell Gwyn

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hither, and play away 100 or 2 or 300 guinnys, without any kind of difficulty : and lastly to see the formality of the groome-porter, who is their judge of all disputes in play and all quarrels that may arise therein, and how his under-officers are there to observe true play at each table, and to give new dice, is a consideration I never could have thought had been in the world, had I not now seen it. And mighty glad I am that I did see it, and it may be will find another evening before Christmas be over, to see it again, when I may stay later, for their heat of play begins not till about eleven or twelve o'clock ; which did give me another pretty observation of a man, that did win mighty fast when I was there. I think he won £100 at single pieces in a little time. While all the rest envied him his good fortune, he cursed it, saying, ' A pox on it, that it should come so early upon me, for this fortune two hours hence would be worth something to me, but then, God damn me, I shall have no such luck.' This kind of prophane, mad entertainment they give themselves. And so I, having enough for once, refusing to venture, though Brisband pressed me hard, and tempted me with saying that no man was ever known to lose the first time, the devil being too cunning to discourage a gamester ; and he offered me also to lend me ten pieces to venture ; but I did refuse, and so went away."

So great was the craze for cards that it was made the subject of many verses. Sir George Etherege

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## Catherine of Braganza

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wrote the following "Song of Basset," which shows what a hold gaming had on society :

- " Let equipage and dress despair  
Since Basset is come in ;  
For nothing can oblige the fair  
Like money or moreen.
- " Is any countess in distress,  
She flies not to her *beau* ;  
'Tis only coney can redress  
Her grief with a *rouleau*.
- " By this bewitching game betray'd,  
Poor love is bought and sold ;  
And that which should be a free trade,  
Is now engross'd by gold.
- " Even sense is brought into disgrace  
Where company is met.  
Or silent stands, or leaves the place,  
While all the talk's Basset.
- " Why, ladies, will you stake your hearts,  
Where a plain cheat is found ?  
You first are rook'd out of those darts  
That gave yourselves the wound.
- " The time, which should be kindly lent  
To plays and witty men,  
In waiting for a knave is spent,  
Or wishing for a ten.
- " Stand in defence of your own charms,  
Throw down this favourite,  
That threatens, with his dazzling arms,  
Your beauty and your wit.
- " What pity 'tis, those conquering eyes  
Which all the world subdue,  
Should, while the lover gazing dies,  
Be only on Alpue."

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## Nell Gwyn

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There is, in Pepys, an interesting description of a Court Ball given in honour of Catherine's birthday (November 15, 1666) :

" I also to the ball, and with much ado got up to the loft, where with much trouble I could see very well. Anon the house grew full, and the candles light, and the King and Queen and all the ladies set ; and it was, indeed, a glorious sight to see Mrs. Stuart in black and white lace, and her head and shoulders dressed with dyamonds, and the like a great many great ladies more, only the Queen none ; and the King in a rich vest of some rich silke and silver trimmings, as the Duke of York and all the dancers wore some of cloth of silver, and others of other sorts, exceeding rich. Presently after the King was come in, he took the Queene, and about fourteen more couples there was, and begun the Bransles. As many of the men as I can remember present, were, the King, Duke of York, Prince Rupert, Duke of Monmouth, Duke of Buckingham, Lord Douglas, Mr. [Guye] Hamilton, Colonel Russell, Mr. Griffith, Lord Ossory, Lord Rochester ; and of the ladies, the Queen, Duchess of York, Mrs. Stuart, Duchess of Monmouth, Lady Essex Howard, Mrs. Temple, Swedes Embassadress, Lady Arlington, Lord George Berkeley's daughter, and many others I remember not ; but all most excellently dressed in rich petticoats and gowns, and diamonds and pearls.

" After Bransles, then to a Corant, and now and then a French dance ; but that so rare that the Corants grew tiresome, that I wished it done. Only Mrs. Stuart danced mighty finely, and many French dances,



"Only Mrs Stuart danced mightily finely, and many French dances,"



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## Catherine of Braganza

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specially one with the King called the New Dance, which was very pretty ; but upon the whole matter, the business of the dancing of itself was not extraordinary pleasing. But the clothes and sights of the persons was indeed very pleasing, and worth my coming, being never likely to see more gallantry while I live, if I should come twenty times. . . . My Lady Castlemayne, without whom all is nothing, being there, very rich though not dancing."

Whether the Queen knew of the King's relations with Lady Castlemaine before she came to England is not known, but she must have been put wise in this matter about the time of her arrival, for when the list of the members of her Household was presented to her, she struck out the name of Lady Castlemaine, who had been put down as a Lady of the Bedchamber. Further than this, she refused definitely to receive Lady Castlemaine at Court, and said that if this were forced upon her, she would return forthwith to Portugal.

Catherine thus won the first round, but the King, no doubt spurred on by Lady Castlemaine, was determined that the final victory should be his. It was left to Clarendon to persuade Her Majesty, but this was as difficult as it was distasteful to him, and days passed without any settlement being arrived at. At last the King became angry, and wrote to the Chancellor :

" Lest you should think that by making no farther stir in the business, you may divert me from my resolution, which all the world shall never do, I wish I may

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## Nell Gwyn

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be unhappy in this world and in the world to come, if I fail in the least degree of what I am resolved, which is making my Lady Castlemaine of my wife's Bed-chamber, and whoever I find endeavouring to hinder this resolution of mine, except it be only to myself, I will be his enemy to the last moment of my life."

In the meantime there had been a tremendous rumpus in the Castlemaine household. The Earl, who was a Roman Catholic, had, without warning his wife, had the second child, Charles, baptized by a priest of his own faith. Lady Castlemaine was furious, and appealed to the King. As a result the infant was again baptized, this time at St. Margaret's, Westminster.

Lady Castlemaine then left her husband, and taking the children with her, went to stay with a relative at Richmond. Pepys, however, believed that there was more calculation than anger behind this move. "This day," he wrote on July 16, "I was told that my Lady Castlemaine, being quite fallen out with her husband, did yesterday go away from him, with all her plate, jewels, and other best things ; and is gone to Richmond to a brother of hers ; which, I am apt to think, was a design to get out of town, that the King might come at her the better."

Ten days later the diarist has more to say on the subject : "Mrs. Sarah told me how the falling out between my Lady Castlemaine and her Lord was about christening of the child lately, which he would have, and had done by a priest : and some days after, she had it again christened by a minister ; the King, and Lord of Oxford, and Countess of Suffolk being wit-

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## Catherine of Braganza

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nesses : and christened with a proviso, that it had not already been christened. Since that, she left her Lord, carrying away every thing in the house ; so much as every dish, and cloth, and servant, but the porter. He is gone discontented into France, they say, to enter a monastery ; and now she is coming back again to her house in King Street. But I hear that the Queen did prick her out of the list presented her by the King ; desiring that she might have that favour done her, or that he would send her from whence she come : and that the King was angry, and the Queen discontented a whole day and night upon it ; but that the King hath promised to have nothing to do with her hereafter. But I cannot believe that the King can fling her off so, he loving her too well."

Of course, in the long run, Charles, who held all the winning cards, had his way. He himself brought Lady Castlemaine to Court. Her Majesty was as greatly incensed as she was distressed, and Clarendon records, "The Queen was no longer sate in her chair, but her colour changed, and tears gushed out of her eyes, and her nose bled, and she fainted, so that she was forthwith removed to another room, and all the company retired out of that where she was before."

Ultimately the Queen, perforce, accepted the situation, though it will be seen from a letter written by Clarendon to the Duke of Ormonde, she did not yield unconditionally. "All things are bad with reference to Lady Castlemaine," Clarendon wrote on September 9, 1662, "but I think not quite so bad as you hear,

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Everybody takes her to be of the Bedchamber, for she is always there and goes abroad in the coach. But the Queen tells me that the King promised her, on condition she would use her as she hath others, 'that she should never live in Court;' yet lodgings I think she hath; I hear of no back stairs. The worst is, the King is as discomposed as ever, and looks as little after business, which breaks my heart. He seeks satisfaction in other company, who do not love him as well as you and I do."

In September the King, the Queen and Lady Castlemaine were seen driving in the same coach, together with "Mr. Crofts, the King's bastard," who was making love to the royal mistress. It is believed that Charles hurried on the marriage of his son in order to withdraw him from Lady Castlemaine's attractions.

This was not the only way in which Catherine was ill-treated. She was to have received £40,000 a year for her allowance, but she rarely had this amount, and once she had to complain to Parliament that she had only received £4,000. Her retinue, of both sexes, which had accompanied her from Lisbon, were unpopular in this country, and most of them returned home at an early date.

As for the territorial acquisitions which his consort had brought to Charles as dowry, while it is true that Bombay was destined to lay the foundations of England's empire of India, far otherwise was it with Tangier. That settlement was quite speedily abandoned, ostensibly on the ground of expense of upkeep,

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the fact being that Charles was little inclined to expenditure upon anything that appertained not to his personal desires and appetites. Tangier was left to become a mere congeries of pirates and freebooters instead of a valuable British naval base on the Mediterranean.

It was little to the credit of Lord Clarendon as Chancellor that at Charles's bidding he undertook to see the Queen and make her realize the King's point of view. Catherine not unnaturally remarked that she "did not think she should find the King engaged in his affections to another lady." A little later, we find Clarendon writing to the Duke of Ormonde as above.

In honour of Catherine's birthday (November 15), Waller composed a poem which was sung to the Queen at a Court ball by the vocalist, Mrs. Knight, who was afterwards numbered among Charles's mistresses. This fulsome effusion was as follows :

" This happy day two lights are seen :  
A glorious Saint, a matchless Queen,  
Both named alike, both crowned appear,  
The Saint above, the Infanta here.  
May all those years which Catherine  
The martyr did for Heaven resign  
Be added to the line  
Of your blest life among us here !  
For all the pangs that she did feel,  
And all the torments of her wheel,  
May you as many pleasures share.  
May Heaven itself content  
With Catherine the Saint !  
Without appearing old,  
An hundred times may you  
With eyes as bright as now,  
This happy day behold ! "

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Catherine's "blest life" was rendered little happier by the coarseness of the entertainments given at Whitehall. They sang songs, as Macaulay has mentioned, "the double meaning of which was too flimsily veiled to require any effort at interpretation; they would put on a page's dress for a frolic, and engage in the most vulgar and outrageous adventures."

In 1663 the Queen nearly died, as the result of a terrible illness which dissipated all hopes of an heir to the throne.

Grammont has an account of this illness, which nearly proved fatal. "The Queen," he says, "was given over by her physicians: the few Portuguese women who had not been sent back to their own country filled the Court with doleful cries; and the good nature of the King was much affected with the situation in which he saw a princess whom, though he did not love her, yet he greatly esteemed. She loved him tenderly, and thinking that it was the last time she should ever speak to him, she told him that 'the concern he showed for her death was enough to make her quit life with regret, but that, not possessing charms sufficient to merit his tenderness, she had at least the consolation in dying to give place to a consort who might be more worthy of it and to whom Heaven, perhaps, might grant a blessing that had been refused to her.' At these words she bathed his hands with some tears, which he thought would be her last; he mingled his own with hers, and, without supposing she would take him at his word, he conjured her to live for his sake."

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In her delirium, the poor woman actually believed that not merely a child, but children, had been born to her, and was heard to cry out: "How are my children?"

More cynical than Grammont was the French Ambassador, who wrote to his King at this time:

"I am just come from Whitehall, where I left the Queen in a state in which, according to the doctors, there is little room for hope. She received extreme unction this morning. . . . The King seems to me deeply affected. He supped, nevertheless, yesterday evening at Madame de Castlemaine's, and had his usual conversations with Mademoiselle Stuart, of whom he is very fond. There is already talk of his marrying [again]. Everyone gives him a wife according to his inclination, and there are some who do not look for her out of England."

In the following year Edward Montague was dismissed from the post of Master of the Horse to the Queen in somewhat singular circumstances. While Pepys believes that his dismissal was thanks to his own pride in "affecting to seem great with the Queen," Miss Strickland states that "his offence was supposed to be his great attachment to the service of his royal mistress, whose cause he always upheld with more warmth than discretion." Another version was to the effect that Montague gave offence to Catherine by squeezing her hand, and that the King, meeting the Master of the Horse one day, asked him sarcastically "How his mistress did?" Anyway, after his

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dismissal from Court Montague volunteered for the fleet, and lost his life in action under Lord Sandwich. Speaking of the life of the Court to Pepys, one of his friends remarked that "of all places, if there be Hell, it is here. No faith, no truth, no love nor any agreement between man and wife nor friends."

The royal lady must indeed have been grateful for any attention shown her. Her life certainly was very dull. She was fond of the theatre, which she visited from time to time ; but it may well be imagined that on one occasion at least her pleasure in the entertainment was dashed by the fact that after she had arrived Goodman, the manager, kept the curtain down until Lady Castlemaine, who was late, had taken her seat. She was perhaps most happy when she could get away from Court, and stay at Somerset House, which was settled on her as her dower-house. There she would give tea-parties, at a time when that beverage, which had lately been introduced by her countrymen, was little known in England.

Waller wrote some lines on "Tea, commended by Her Majesty."

"VENUS her myrtle, PHOEBUS has his bays ;  
Tea both excels, which she vouchsafes to praise  
The best of Queens, and best of herbs, we owe  
To that bold nation, which the way did show  
To the fair region, where the sun does rise ;  
Whose rich productions we so justly prize.  
The Muse's friend, Tea, does our fancy aid ;  
Repress those vapors which the Lead invade ;  
And keeps that palace of the soul serene  
Fit, on her birthday, to salute the Queen."



"Venus her myrtle, Phoebus has his bays;  
 Tea both excels, which she vouchsafes to praise,  
 The best of Queens, and best of herbs, we owe  
 To that bold nation, which the way did show  
 To the fair region, where the sun does rise:  
 Whose rich productions we so justly prize.  
 The Muse's friend, Tea, does our fancy aid,  
 Repress those vapors which the head invade:  
 And keeps that palace of the soul serene,  
 Fit, on her birthday, to salute the Queen."



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Catherine took no interest in domestic politics, and never attempted to use such influence as she might have, with the mortifying consequence that all aspirants after place or grants devoted themselves to the King's mistresses, to Lady Castlemaine or Frances Stuart (of whom something will presently be said), to Nell Gwyn or Louise de K  roualle.

Her one political interest was in connection with Portugal, which the Pope, who had the Spanish cause at heart, refused to recognize as a Kingdom. So strongly did she feel about this that, it is recorded, she once was very rude to the Spanish Ambassador when he was at Court.

Her devotion to her religion was very sincere, and her chapel became a rendezvous for the leading English Roman Catholics, with the result that in 1667 an Order in Council was made to forbid their assembling there. Titus Oates, some eleven years later, at the time of the so-called "Popish Plot," made capital out of this, and actually set on foot the rumour that she had planned the death of the King. Several of her servants suffered the death-penalty before this plot was finally exploded. It is to Charles's credit that he behaved extremely well at this crisis, finally writing to his wife's brother, Don Pedro II., in Portugal: "We doubt not but that your Highness hath already heard of the unhappy reflexion that hath been lately rais'd against Our Dear Consort the Queen, and do believe your Highness hath taken a sensible part with Us, in that Indignation wherewith we have resented the same." An alleged Jesuit plot against the King's life

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also broke down badly. It was engineered by those who desired the disappearance of Catherine at whatever cost and by whatever means.

The King was deeply grieved that Catherine did not give him an heir. He had many children by his mistresses, but not one to succeed him on the throne. More than once there was hope that she would bear children. On June 7, Pepys noted: "Mrs. Turner, who is often at Court, do tell me to-day that for certain the Queen hath changed her humour, and is become very pleasant and sociable as any; and they say is with child, or believed to be so." Again in 1668 and 1669 there were similar rumours, but these hopes were doomed to disappointment. As a result there was much scheming. There were all sorts of stories about. "This morning," Pepys wrote on September 7, 1667, "I was told by Sir W. Batten that he do hear from Mr. Grey, who hath good intelligence, that our Queen is to go into a nunnery, there to spend her days; and that my Lady Castlemaine is going into France, and is to have a pension of £4,000 a year. This latter I do believe more than the other, it being very wise in her to do it, and save all she hath, besides easing the King and kingdom of a burden and reproach." As a matter of fact, neither of these things came to pass.

In order to provide a direct heir to the throne, there were those who advocated a divorce, and even those, and among them clergymen, who seriously argued that in this case polygamy was permissible.

Her life was lonely, and there is a touching story,

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that when someone watched her lingering over her toilet, and asked : " I wonder how your Majesty can have the patience to sit so long undressing ? " she replied : " I have so much reason to use patience that I can very well bear with it."

## CHAPTER XII

### LADY CASTLEMAINE AND LA BELLE STUART

Charles II. on his good behaviour.—Soon weary of restraint.—He neglects his Consort.—Lady Castlemaine again in favour.—But only for a short time.—The King transfers his attention.—Frances Teresa Stuart.—Her beauty.—Her admirers.—She resists the King.—Her fear of him.—She seeks the protection of the Queen.—She marries the Duke of Richmond.—The King's anger.—She presently returns to Court.—A frolic with the Queen.—Her later life.—Lady Castlemaine and Frances Stuart.—Lady Castlemaine avenges herself.—Her lovers.—John Churchill.—William Wycherley.—Her children.—She joins the Church of Rome.—She separates from her husband.—Again in favour with the King.—Two lampoons.—Lady Castlemaine created Duchess of Cleveland.

**F**OR a short time—a matter of a few weeks only—after his marriage, Charles, as Burnet puts it, “carried things decently, and did not visit his mistress openly.” But this good conduct did not endure. “He soon grew weary of that restraint, and shook it off so entirely, that he had ever after that mistresses to the end of his life; to the great scandal of the world.” He was entirely indifferent to appearance, and the chronicler relates that: “He usually came from his mistresses’ lodgings to church, even on Sacrament days. He held, as it were, a Court in them, and all his ministers made application to them, only the Earls of Clarendon and Southampton would never so much as make a visit to them.”

So early as July 6, 1662, Lady Sandwich told

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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Pepys that she was distressed to find that Lady Castlemaine was still in high favour with the King, and that he visited her as often as he had before his marriage. By the end of the year there was no disguise about their meetings. Pepys records on December 1: "The King's dalliance with my Lady Castlemaine being public, every day, to his great reproach;" and on New Year's Day wrote: "The King sups at least four times every week with my Lady Castlemaine, and most often stays till the morning with her, and goes home through the garden all alone privately, and that so as the very sentries take notice and speak of it."

Lady Castlemaine's star was full in the ascendant. The King gave her all the Christmas presents made to him by the peers, which, as it was remarked, was "an abominable thing." He showered jewels so lavishly on her, so that at a royal ball in February, 1663, she was more handsomely decked than the Queen and the Duchess of York put together! "I did hear," Pepys wrote on April 23, 1663, "that the Queen is much grieved of late at the King's neglecting her, he not having supped once with her this quarter of a year, and almost every night with my Lady Castlemaine, who hath been with him this St. George's feast at Windsor, and come home with him last night; and, what is more, they say is removed as to her bed from her own home to a chamber in Whitehall, next to the King's own; which I am sorry to hear, though I love her much."

Then came the sudden fall of Lady Castlemaine

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from favour, which was quickly noted at Court and duly recorded by Pepys :

"July 3, 1663 : Mr. Moore tells me great news that my Lady Castlemaine is fallen from Court and this morning retired. He gives me no account of the reason, but that it is so ; for which I am sorry ; and yet, if the King do it to leave off not only her, but all other mistresses, I should be heartily glad of it, that he may fall to look after business."

"July 13, 1663 : There was also [in Pall Mall] my Lady Castlemaine, who rode among the rest of the ladies ; but the King took, methought, no notice of her ; nor when she alighted did anybody press, as she seemed to expect, and stayed for it, to take her down, but was taken down by her own gentleman. She looked mighty out of humour, and had a yellow plume in her hat, which all took notice of, and yet is very handsome, but very melancholy ; nor did anybody speak to her, or she so much as smile or speak to anybody. I followed them up to Whitehall, and into the Queen's presence, where all the ladies walked, talking and fiddling with their hats and feathers, and changing and trying them on each other's heads and laughing ; but it was the finest sight to me considering their great beauties and dress. But above all, Mrs. Stuart in this dress, with her hat cocked and a red plume with her sweet eyes, little Roman nose, and excellent *taille*, is now the greatest beauty I ever saw, I think in all my life ; and if ever woman can, does exceed my Lady Castlemaine, at least in this dress, which I verily

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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believe is the reason of his coldness to my Lady Castlemaine."

" July 21, 1663 : In discourse of the ladies at Court, Captain Ferrers tells me that my Lady Castlemaine is now as great as ever she was ; and that her going away was only a fit of her own upon some slighting words of the King, so that she called for her coach at a quarter of an hour's warning, and went to Richmond ; and the King the next morning, under pretence of going a-hunting, went to see her and make friends, and never was a-hunting at all. After which, she came back to Court, and commands the King as much as ever, and hath and doth what she will. No longer ago than last night, there was a private entertainment made for the King and Queen at the Duke of Buckingham's, and she was not invited : but being at my Lady Suffolk's, her aunt's, where my Lady Jemimah and Lord Sandwich dined, yesterday, she was heard to say, ' Well, much good may it do them, and for all that, I will be as merry as they : ' and so she went home, and caused a great supper to be prepared. And after the King had been with the Queen at Wallingford House, he comes to my Lady Castlemaine's, and was there all night, and my Lord Sandwich with him. He tells me he believes that as soon as the King can get a husband for Mrs. Stuart, however, my Lady Castlemaine's nose will be out of joynt ; for that she comes to be in great esteem, and is far more handsome than she."

The reason for the temporary eclipse of Lady Castlemaine was that Charles had fallen a victim to the

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youthful charms of "La Belle Stuart," who had newly arrived at Court. Frances Teresa Stuart, who was born on July 8, 1647, was the elder daughter of a doctor, who went to France when she was two years old, where he was probably attached to the household of Queen Henrietta Maria, the widow of Charles I. She was educated in France, and there in her girlhood attracted the attention of Louis XIV., who, says Pepys, "would fain have had her mother, who was one of the most cunning women in the world, to let her stay in France." The mother would perhaps have raised no objection, but Queen Henrietta Maria would have none of it, and sent her to England with a letter to her son in January, 1623.

This was, indeed, a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire. Everyone at Court fell in love with her—never did a girl of sixteen have such a success. The Duke of Buckingham laid siege to her, and Count Grammont, and George Digby and the rest of the gallants. John Roettlers took her as the model for Britannia, and Anthony Hamilton lost his heart to her and nearly won her by holding two lighted tapers in his mouth longer than any others of her admirers could. This gives the measure of her mentality. She loved blindman's buff, had a passionate devotion to hunt-the-slipper, and was an adept at building houses with cards. As for her conversation, it was childish; so much so that Anthony Hamilton, taking for the nonce the lighted tapers out of his mouth, declared that "it was hardly possible for a woman to have less wit and more beauty."

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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The King himself succumbed to her as to no other of the ladies he dishonoured with his affection. When, in November, 1663, the Queen was thought to be dying it was generally supposed that he would marry her. She did not return his love, and certainly did not feel passionate about him and probably not about any other man. He offered her titles, but she refused; she did, however, condescend to accept jewels. She tantalized Charles by refusing to yield to him—until a *calèche* was sent to London from France. The story goes that the Queen herself and all the Court Favourites wanted to be seen in it the first time it was driven in public. "La Belle Stuart" was the first seen in the new vehicle—and the King had his way with her.

This story is in direct contradiction to a conversation after her marriage which Frances Stuart had with a certain peer whose name has not transpired. This conversation was repeated to Evelyn, and is recorded by Pepys on April 3, 1667: "She was come to that pass as to resolve to have married any gentleman of £1,500 a year that would have her in honour; for it was come to the pass that she could not longer continue at Court without prostituting herself to the King, whom she had so long kept off, though he had liberty more than any other had, or he ought to have, as to dalliance. She told this lord that she had reflected upon the occasion she had given the world to think her a bad woman, and that she had no way but to marry and leave the Court, rather in this way of discontent than otherwise, that the

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world might see that she sought not anything but honour."

The King's attentions, coupled with her own indiscreet behaviour, undoubtedly compromised the girl, and even so early as June, 1663, Pepys speaks of the mistresses, Lady Castlemaine and Miss Stuart. As the years passed Charles, unused to rebuffs, became increasingly persistent, and Miss Stuart became thoroughly alarmed. She now adopted a sensible course. "Frances Stuart," says Mr. Davidson, the biographer of Charles's consort, "now sought the support of Catherine. She went to her rooms, and flinging herself on her knees before her, bathed in tears, confessed her folly and unworthy conduct in allowing Charles's attentions to single her out from the Court, and earnestly begged Catherine's forgiveness. She told her she knew she had caused her own trouble by her vanity and love of admiration, and assured the Queen that that was all she could be charged with. Catherine implicitly believed her and was grieved at her trouble. She raised her and comforted her, and promised her her protection, which to the end of both their lives she continued, together with her friendship. She kept Frances Stuart constantly in her own presence, and people believed that she helped on the marriage with the Duke of Richmond, though there is no proof whatever of it. Frances assured her that she had never accepted anything from the King but a few jewels of little value, given on New Years' days and the like, and that the Duke of York had presented her with a jewel worth £800 when he drew her for his

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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valentine—an event in which presents were always given.”

“A gentleman of £1,500 a year”—and more—was soon to the fore. This was no less a personage than her cousin, Charles Stuart, third Duke of Richmond and sixth Duke of Lennox and tenth Seigneur d’Aubigny, who was then in his twenty-ninth year. The Duke’s second wife died on January 6, 1667, and in a week or two he asked his “fair cousin” to marry him—a proposal that, in the circumstances, she favoured.

The King, who heard of this project, was at his wits’ end. There was nothing he was not prepared to do to keep the girl at Court. He offered to create her a Duchess—she would none of it. He offered “to re-arrange his seraglio”—it did not interest her. In despair, he was prepared to make her his Consort, if only he could get a divorce from his Queen on any pretext whatsoever—say, on the ground that Catherine was incapable of bearing an heir to the throne—and he actually went so far as to consult the Archbishop of Canterbury on the matter.

And then, towards the end of March, 1667, Frances Stuart, “on a dark and stormy night,” fled from her apartment in the Palace of Whitehall, met the Duke of Richmond at the Bear Inn, by London Bridge, and was well and truly married.

The rage of the King knew no bounds, and it was said that one of the results of it was the downfall of Clarendon, who was believed by him to have opposed the project of the King’s divorce. It must be

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admitted, however, that there were other contributory causes.

After her elopement the Duchess returned all the presents of jewellery that had been given her by the King, who was so hurt by this that he wrote a letter full of self-pity to his sister, Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans :

“ You may think me ill-natured, but if you consider how hard a thing it is to swallow an injury done by a person I had so much tenderness for, you will in some degree excuse the resentment I use towards her : you know my good-nature enough to believe that I could not be so severe if I had not had great provocation. I assure you her carriage towards me has been as bad as a breach of faith and friendship can make it, therefore I hope you will pardon me if I cannot so soon forget an injury which went so near my heart.”

Could anything be more pathetic ? Think of the breach of faith made by Frances Stuart towards a kindly and generous-hearted monarch ! From the age of fifteen to the age of nineteen she had—this royal lament suggests—resisted the dishonourable intentions of a King and, when they became too insistent, had run away from them. This was indeed base ingratitude. Anyhow, His Majesty for a while refused to receive the guilty couple at Court.

The rest of the story may be told here.

The marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Richmond was not a success, and it has been said that the lady was presently more inclined to smile upon the King. They soon returned to London. “ I hear this day,”

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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Pepys noted on December 25, 1667, "that Mrs. Stuart do at this day, keep a great court at Somerset House, with her husband the Duke of Richmond, she being visited for the beauty's sake by people, as the Queen is, at nights; and they say also that she is likely to go to Court again, and there put my Lady Castlemaine's nose out of joint." And early in the following month he wrote: "Mrs. Pierce tells me that the Duchess of Richmond do not yet come to the Court, nor hath seen the King, nor will not, nor do he own his desire of seeing her, but hath used means to get her to Court, but they do not take." But that, perhaps, was all part of the game.

It was soon seen that the King still hankered strongly after her. "Word was brought," says Pepys on March 26, "that the Duchess of Richmond is pretty well, but mighty full of the smallpox, by which all do conclude she will be wholly spoiled, which is the greatest instance of the uncertainty of beauty that could be in this age; but then she hath had the benefit of it to be first married, and to have kept it so long, under the greatest temptations in the world from a King, and yet without the least imputation."

The Duchess was appointed on July 6, 1668, a Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen, who seems to have liked her well, in spite of the King's devotion to her. In May, 1670, Catherine took her in her suite to Calais to meet the Duchess of Orleans; and in the following October the Duchess accompanied her on a visit to Audley End, where, as is recorded in the Pastor Letters, they indulged in a "frolic." "There

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being a fair at Audley End, the Queen, Duchess of Richmond, and Duchess of Buckingham had a frolic to disguise themselves like country lasses, in red petticoats, waistcoats, etc., and to go see the fair. Sir Bernard Gascoigne, on a cart-jade, rode before the Queen, another stranger before the Duchess of Buckingham and Mr. Roper before Richmond. They had all so overdone it in their disguise, and looked so much more like antiques than country folk, that as soon as they came to the fair the people began to go after them: but the Queen, going to a booth to buy a pair of yellow stockings for her sweetheart, and Sir Bernard asking for a pair of gloves stitched with blue for his sweetheart, they were soon by their gibberish found to be strangers, which drew a bigger stock about them,—one amongst them had seen the Queen at dinner, knew her, and was proud of his knowledge. This soon brought all the fair into a crowd to stare at the Queen. Being thus discovered, they as soon as they could got to their horses; but as many of the fair as had horses got up, with wives, sweethearts, and neighbours behind them, to get as much gape as they could, till they brought them to the Court gate. Thus was a merry frolic turned into a penance."

What were the relations at this time between the King and the Duchess of Richmond cannot be said, but it is certain that she raised no objection when her husband was sent on one foreign mission after another. The Duke, who has been described as "a man too much addicted to drink, but otherwise harm-

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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less," died in 1672. His titles reverted to the King, who, though not lineally descended from any of the Dukes of Lennox or Richmond, yet was the nearest collateral heir male. This title he later bestowed on his natural son, Charles Lennox, by Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth. The widowed Duchess of Richmond was much sought in marriage, but she refused all offers. She survived until 1702.

Lady Castlemaine had put up a good fight when Frances Stuart first captured the affections of the King, but the fight for the moment was in vain. De Cominges wrote to Louis XIV. on July 5, 1663 : "There was a great quarrel the other day among the ladies, which was carried so far that the King threatened the lady at whose apartments he sups every evening that he would never set foot there again if he did not find the demoiselle with her"—the demoiselle being, of course, Frances Stuart; and Grammont also had something to say on the matter: "Lady Castlemaine was not satisfied with appearing without any degree of uneasiness at a preference which all the Court began to remark; she even affected to make Miss Stuart her favourite, and invited her to all the entertainments she made for the King, being confident that, whenever she thought fit, she could triumph over all the advantages which these opportunities could afford Miss Stuart; but she was quite mistaken."

Lady Castlemaine was not a woman to sit quietly under neglect. She had a vast appetite for amours. When the King stayed away from her for some time, she satisfied herself with others. Even when Charles

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was paying her attentions, her faithfulness was not to be relied on. Her lovers were as varied as they were numerous. Of Charles Hart and Henry Jermyn mention has already been made; there was also Sir Charles Berkeley. Andrew Marvell, in some lines too coarse to reprint here, in "Last Instructions to a Painter about the Dutch War, 1667," gives a graphic account of a liaison of Lady Castlemaine with a hefty footman. Better authenticated is her affair with Jacob Hall, the rope-dancer, who appears to have given his earliest performances at Smithfield in connection with Bartholomew Fair. Pepys mentions that, "My Lady Castlemaine is mightily in love with Hall, and he is much with her in private, and she goes to him, and do give him many presents; and that the thing is most certain, and Beck Marshall only privy to it, and the means of bringing them together, which is a very odd thing; and by this means she is even with the King's love to Mrs. Davis."

Then there was John Churchill (afterwards Duke of Marlborough), with whom her liaison was prosecuted with unfortunate results. This was known to all the town, and it is said that the Duke of Buckingham, always eager to do a bad turn to an enemy, and, it must be confessed, not anxious to do a good turn to anyone, contrived to introduce the King into the Duchess of Cleveland's room when Churchill was there. Churchill, so the story goes, jumped out of the window, Charles crying after him, "I forgive you, Sir, for I know you do it for your bread." There was

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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this in the bitter taunt, that Churchill did accept very considerable sums of money from the lady, who was nine years his senior. There was one gift of £5,000 with which the avaricious young soldier purchased an annuity of £500 a year from George, Marquis of Halifax. As he lived for another fifty years, it was not a bad investment. Of this intimacy there came in June, 1672, a daughter, Lady Barbara Fitzroy, the paternity of which, Charles, with all his easy-going good-nature, would not acknowledge. The girl became a nun, but when she was about eighteen had an affair with the Earl of Arran (afterwards fourth Duke of Hamilton) and bore him a son, Charles Hamilton, the historian. She died, unmarried, in 1737. The story of the Duchess of Cleveland's intrigue with Wycherley has been told by George S. Steinman, the biographer of the lady.

"In 1672 William Wycherley brought on the stage the first play. The Duchess of Cleveland was so well pleased with the compliment paid to natural children in a song introduced into *Love in a Wood*, as to honour the performance of it with her presence on two consecutive nights. Meeting the author—young (he was only thirty-two), handsome, manly and brawny—when riding in her chariot in Pall Mall, she leaned half her body out of it, and laughing aloud, in this manner addressed him,—but her salutation and the dialogue which followed shall be given in the words of Dennis: 'You, Wycherley,' said she, 'you are the son of a whore.' The saluted passed on in his chariot, and having recovered from his surprise, ordered the

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## Nell Gwyn

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coachman to turn back and overtake the Duchess. When this was accomplished, 'Madam,' said he, 'you have been pleased to bestow a title on me which generally belongs to the Fortunate. Will your Ladyship be at the Play to-night?' 'Well,' she replied, 'what if I am there?' 'Why, then I shall be there to wait on your Ladyship, tho' I disappoint a very fine woman who has made me an assignation!' 'So,' said she, 'You are sure to disappoint a woman, who has favour'd you for me who has not!' 'Yes,' he reply'd, 'if she who has not favour'd me is the finer woman of the two. But he who will be constant to your Ladyship till he can find a finer woman is sure to die your captive.' The lady is said to have blushed at this speech. The captive and the captor met the same night at Drury Lane Theatre, she sitting in the front row of the King's box, he in the pit, whence he entertained her during the whole play. The intimacy between the couple endangered Wycherley's hopes of preferment at Court. The Duke of Buckingham had for some time engaged spies to watch the Duchess, and had it not been for the intercession of the Earl of Rochester and Sir Charles Sedley, his tongue would have aroused Charles's anger against him. As it came to pass, the favours of the mistress were followed by the favours of the King."

At the time that Charles was obsessed by Frances Stuart, he was, it was thought, "past jealousy" so far as Lady Castlemaine was concerned, and was apparently indifferent as to whether she was or was not faithful to him. When, however, she was brought

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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to bed, on September 20, 1663, of a second son, Henry, he point-blank declined to accept him as his child. In the end, however, he did accept the paternity and created him Duke of Grafton. On September 5, 1664, Lady Castlemaine gave birth to a daughter, Charlotte, and on December 28 of the following year to a son, George, afterwards created Earl of Northumberland.

It was about now that Lady 'Castlemaine announced her conversion to Roman Catholicism, whereupon Shillingfleet remarked dryly, "If the Church of Rome has got no more by her than the Church of England has lost, the matter will not be much."

"Clear the Augean stables, let no stain  
Darken the splendor of our Castlemaine  
At his court gate : may th' ladies of that time  
Be emulators of our Katherine,  
Late come, long wish'd,  
The world new moulded : she who t'other day  
Could chant and chirp like any bird in May,  
Stor'd with caresses of the dearest sort,  
That art could purchase from a foreign court,  
Limn'd so by Nature's pencil, as no part  
But gave a wound, wher'er it found a heart,  
A fortress and *main castle* of defence,  
Secur'd from all assailants saving Sense.  
But she's a convert and a mirror now,  
Both in her carriage and profession too ;  
Divorc'd from strange embraces ; as my pen  
May justly style her England's Magdalen.  
Wherein she's to be held of more esteem  
In being fam'd a convert to the Queen.  
And from relapse that she secur'd might be,  
She wisely daigns to keep her companie."\*

\* From "The Chimney's Scuffle."

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## Nell Gwyn

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Lady Castlemaine in 1666 separated from her husband, it may be assumed, by mutual consent. There were no legal proceedings, and there was no public announcement. They just went their own ways. Lord Castlemaine accompanied Sir Daniel Harvey on his mission to the Porte in 1668, and then took up his residence in Holland for several years. It was not until 1677 that he returned to England, and in the following year he was denounced as a Jesuit by Titus Oates. He was arrested, but after a preliminary examination was released on bail, and while awaiting his trial wrote: "The Compendium, or, a Short View of the late Trials in relation to the present Plot against His Majesty and Government." At the trial, which took place before the Lord Chief Justice Scroggs, he defended himself with great ability, succeeded in discrediting the evidence that Titus Oates had fabricated, and was triumphantly acquitted.

As a zealous Roman Catholic, Castlemaine was chosen by James II. as Ambassador to Rome, where he arrived on Easter Day, 1686, although he was not received in audience by Innocent XI. until the following January. He behaved with more enthusiasm than discretion, with the result that the mission was a failure, and he was recalled. On his return, however, as a reward for his services he was made a Privy Councillor.

After the flight of James II. he was summoned to the bar of the House of Commons and was presently charged with the capital offence of "endeavouring

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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to reconcile this kingdom to the see of Rome." In February, 1690, he was, however, released. He died at Oswestry in 1705, leaving the bulk of his property to his nephew, Charles Palmer.

After the marriage of Frances Stuart, Lady Castlemaine came again into favour, but it is doubtful whether the King still lived with her. "Mr. Pierce, the surgeon, tells me," Pepys noted on August 7, 1667, "that though the King and Lady Castlemaine are friends again, she is not at Whitehall, but at Sir D. Harvey's, whither the King goes to her, and he says she made him promise to offend her no more : that, indeed, she did threaten to bring all his bastards to his closet-door, and hath nearly hectored him to death." Sir Daniel Harvey was then Ranger of Richmond Park, and she used to stay at his house when she was on ill terms with the King. His wife was Elizabeth, sister of Ralph, third Lord Montagu of Boughton (afterwards Earl and Duke of Montagu). Lady Castlemaine presently quarrelled with her hostess, and encouraged Mrs. Corey, the actress known as Doll Common, to mimic her on the stage in the character of Sempronio. In return, Lady Harvey hired people to hiss her and fling oranges at her, and, that not being effective, induced the Lord Chamberlain to imprison her. The King, of course, intervened to release her, but there was a royal row over the whole business.

The temper of Lady Castlemaine became unbearable. When Charles once spoke to her about the infidelities, "the impetuosity of her temper broke forth like

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## Nell Gwyn

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lightning," Grammont relates. "She told him that it very ill became him to throw out such reproaches against one, who, of all the women in England, deserved them the least ; that he had never ceased quarrelling thus unjustly with her, ever since he had betrayed his own mean, low inclinations ; that to gratify such a depraved taste as his, he wanted only such silly things as Stuart, Wells and that pitiful strolling player."

The following lampoons, written after the destruction of the brothels by the London apprentices in March, 1665, indicate the unpopularity of Lady Castlemaine :

" The Poor W——es' Petition to the most Splendid, Illustrious, Serene and Eminent Lady of Pleasure, the Countess of Castlemaine, etc.

" Humbly sheweth,

" That your Petitioners having for a long time conniv'd at, and countenanced in the practice of our . . . pleasures (a trade wherein your Ladyship has great experience, and for your diligence therein, have arrived to a high and eminent advancement for these late years), but now, we, through the rage and malice of a company of London apprentices and other malicious and very bad persons, being mechanic, rude and ill-bred boys, have sustained the loss of our habitations, trades and employments. . . . Will your Eminence therefore be pleased to consider how highly it concerns you to restore us to our former practice with honour, freedom, and safety ; for which we shall oblige ourselves by as many oaths as you please, to

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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contribute to your Ladyship (as our sisters do at Rome and Venice to his Holiness the Pope) that we may have your protection in the exercise of all our . . . pleasures. And we shall endeavour, as our bounden duty, the promoting of your great name and the preservation of your honour, safety and interest, with the hazard of our lives, fortunes and honesty.

“Signed by us, Madam Cresswell and Damaris Page, in the behalf of our sisters and fellow-sufferers (in this day of our calamity) in Dog and Bitch Yard, Lukeners Lane, Saffron Hill, Moor-fields, Chiswell Street, Rosemary Lane, Nightingale Lane, Ratcliffe Highway, Well Close, Church Lane, East Smithfield, etc., this present 25th day of March, 1668.”

The Gracious ANSWER to the most Illustrious *Lady of Pleasure*, the *Countess of Castlem* . . .

### *To the Poor-Whores Petition.*

Right Trusty and Well-beloved Madam Cresswell and Damaris Page, with the rest of the suffering Sisterhood in *Dog and Bitch Yard*, *Lukeners Lane*, *Saffron-Hill*, *Moor-fields*, *Ratcliff-Highway*, etc. We greet you well, in giving you to understand our Noble Mind, by returning our thanks which you are worthy of, in sending us our Titles of Honour, which are but our Due. For on *Shrove-Tuesday* last, splendidly did we appear upon the theatre at W. H., being to amazement wonderfully deck'd with Jewels and Diamonds, which the (abhorred and to be undone) Subjects of this Kingdom have payed for. We have been also

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## Nell Gwyn

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Serene and Illustrious ever since the Day that *Mars* was so instrumental to restore our Goddess *Venus* to her Temple and Worship ; where by special grant, we quickly became a famous Lady : And as a Reward of our Devotion, soon created the Right Honourable, the Countess of *Castlemain*. And as further addition to our illustrious Serenity, according to the ancient Rules and laudable Customs of our Order, we have *cum privilegio* alwayes (without our Husband) satisfied our self with the Delights of *Venus* ; and in our Husbands absence have had a numerous offspring, (who are Bountifully and Nobly provided for) which Practice hath Episcopal Allowance also, according to the Principles of Seer *Shelden*, etc. *If Women hath not children by their own Husbands, they are bound (to prevent their Damnation) to try by using the means with other men :* which wholesome and pleasing Doctrine did for some time hold me fast to his Religion. But since this Seer hath shewn more Cowardize, than Principles of Policy, in fearing to declare the Church of *Rome* to be the True, Ancient, Uniform, Universall and most Holy Mother Church ; therefore we tell you (with all the Sisterhood) that we are now no longer of the Church of *England*, which is but like a Brazen Bison tied to a Barber's wooden Pole, (*viz.*) Protestant Doctrine and Order tied by Parliamentary Power to Roman Catholick Foundations, Constitutions, and Rights, etc. And are become a Convert to, and a professed Member of the Church of *Rome* ; where the worthy Fathers and Confessors, as *Durandus*, *Gentianus*, with multitudes of others, (who were not,

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## Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart

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neither are, of the Protestant, Puritanical, and Fanatical, Conventicling Opinion) do declare *That Venereal Pleasures, accompanied with Loosness, Debauchery, and Profphaneness, are not such heynous crimes and crying Sins, but rather* (as the old women of Loren said) *they do mortifie the Flesh.* And the general Opinion of Holy Mother Church is, *That Venereal Pleasures, in the strictest sence, are but Venial Sins, which Confessor of the meanest Order can forgive.* So that the adoring of *Venus*, is by the Allowance of Great Authority, Desirable, Honourable and Profitable.

But when we understood, in your Address, the Barbarity of those Rude Apprentices, and the cruel Sufferings that the Sisterhood was exposed unto, especially those which were in a hopeful way of Recovery and others that were disabled from giving Accommodation to their Right Honourable Devotaries, with the danger which you convinced us our own Person was in, together with the remembrance of our two new Corivals with *Little Miss*. We were for many Hours swallowed up with Sorrow, and almost drowned in Tears and could not all be comforted until the sweet sound of the Report came to our Ears, *That the L. C. J. K. and his Brethren, with our Counsel learned in the Law, had Commission and Instruction given to frame a Bill of Indictment against the trayterous and Rebellious Boys, and to select a Jury of Gentlemen that should shew them no favour:* At which our Noble Spirit revived, and presently we consulted how we might express our Grace and Compassion

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## Nell Gwyn

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towards you, and also seasonably provide for the future safety of your practice and exercise our Revenge upon those that so grossly abused you, and therein offered such an insufferable Affront to our Eminency, that we cannot bear without great Indignation.

*Item.* To any other then here directed, give no Entertainment without Ready Money, lest you suffer Loss. For had we not been careful in that particular, we had neither gained Honour nor Rewards, which are now (as you know) both conferred upon Us.

*Given at our Closset in King Street, Westminster,  
Die Veneris, April 24, 1662.*

CASTLEM . . .

Lady Castlemaine, Burnet has related, spoke of the King to all people in such a manner as brought him under much contempt, but, the historian adds, "he seems insensible." Charles, however, sought comparative peace in the company of other charmers, and among these was Nell Gwyn, who at least did not make scenes. But his quarrels with Lady Castlemaine alternated with periods of affection. He still showered gifts upon her. In 1667 he gave her as a peace-offering some six thousand ounces of silver from the royal jewel-house. In the following year he presented her with the valuable property of Berkshire House, St. James's. A considerable part of this estate she shortly after sold as building land, reserving, however, enough for the erection of a mansion, Cleveland House.

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## **Lady Castlemaine and La Belle Stuart**

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Her name is still preserved in this neighbourhood by Cleveland Court, Cleveland Square and Cleveland Row. In August, 1670, Lady Castlemaine was created Baroness Nonsuch of Nonsuch Park, Surrey, Countess of Southampton and Duchess of Cleveland, with remainder to her first and third natural sons, Charles and George "Palmer." At the same time the King gave her the park and palace of Nonsuch, near Sutton.

## CHAPTER XIII

### NELL GWYN BECOMES THE MISTRESS OF CHARLES II

The marriage of "La Belle Stuart."—Lady Castlemaine again in favour.—She is created Duchess of Cleveland.—The King is attracted by Nell Gwyn.—Etherege's lines on this.—She delivers the Epilogue to *Tyrannic Love*.—The broad-brimmed hat.—Charles takes her into keeping.—Mrs. Knight.—The relations between the King and Nell Gwyn.—Her "Charles the Third."—Her negligent attire.—Her power of swearing.—Her sense of humour.—Harry Killigrew.—Sir John Coventry.—"The Haymarket Hectors."—Nell Gwyn's later performance.—The birth of her first child.—She leaves the stage, and never returns to it.—Appointed a Lady of the Privy Chamber to the Queen.

**A**FTER the marriage of "La Belle Stuart," Lady Castlemaine again became supreme with the King. Gifts of money were showered upon her. She was given Berkshire House, St. James's, which, with the land adjoining, she sold for a handsome price, retaining only the south-west corner of the estate upon which was erected Cleveland House. In August, 1670, she was created Baroness Nonsuch of Nonsuch Park, Surrey, Countess of Southampton and Duchess of Cleveland, and at the same time Charles gave her the palace and park of Nonsuch, near Cheam. She was now, however, to suffer other eclipses. Nell Gwyn came upon the scene, and then Louise de Kéroualle.

Charles II. must often have seen Nell Gwyn before

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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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he decided to make her his mistress, for he was frequently at the theatre, and also during the Plague, when the theatres were closed, she had acted before him at his Palace of Whitehall. It is said that she was urged upon him by the Duke of Buckingham, who wished to counteract the influence of Lady Castlemaine on his royal master. Ethrege puts it thus :

“ Dread Sir, quoth B . . . ham, in Duty bound,  
I come to give your Kingship counsel sound :  
I wonder you should dote so like a Fop,  
On Cl[evelan]d—whom her very Footmen g—pe :  
Dose think you don’t your Parliament offend  
That all they give you on a Beggar spend ;  
Permit me, Sir, to recommend a Whore,  
Kiss her but once, you’ll ne’er kiss C[leveland] more ;  
She’ll fit you to a hair, all Wit, all Fire,  
And Impudence, to your Heart’s desire ;  
And more than this, Sir, you’ll save Money by her }  
She’s B[uckhurst]’s Whore at present, but you know  
When Sovereigns want a Whore, that Subjects must forego.”

But, as a matter of fact, though the Duke of Buckingham may have suggested the matter to the King, the charms of the girl were in themselves quite sufficient to inflame him.

Oldys has it that Charles II. was first seriously attracted by Nell Gwyn when she delivered the Epilogue to Dryden’s *Tyrannic Love, or, The Royal Martyr*. The amusing Epilogue, following on the tragedy, must have been something in the nature of an anti-climax, and was probably written for the especial purpose of giving scope for an exhibition of Nell’s humorous gifts. It is marked as “ Spoken by Mrs.

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## Nell Gwyn

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Ellen Gwyn when she was to be carried off dead by the bearers," and runs as follows :

### " TO THE BEARER.

" ' Hold ; are you mad ? you damn'd confounded dog !  
I am to rise, and speak the epilogue.'

### " TO THE AUDIENCE.

" ' I come, kind gentlemen, strange news to tell ye ;  
I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.  
Sweet ladies, be not frightened ; I'll be civil,  
I'm what I was, a little harmless devil.  
For, after death, we spirits have just such natures  
We had, for all the world, when human creatures ;  
And, therefore I, that was an actress here,  
Play all my tricks in hell, a goblin there.  
Gallants, look to't, you say there are no sprites ;  
But I'll come dance about your beds at nights.  
And faith you'll be in a sweet kind of taking,  
When I surprise you between sleep and waking.  
To tell you true, I walk, because I die,  
Out of my calling, in a tragedy.  
O poet, damn'd dull poet, who could prove  
So senseless, to make Nelly die for love !  
Nay, what's yet worse, to kill me in the prime  
Of Easter Term, in tart and cheesecake time !  
I'll fit the fop ; for I'll not one word say,  
To excuse his godly out-of-fashion play ;  
A play, which if you dare but twice sit out,  
You'll all be slander'd, and be thought devout.  
But, farewell, gentlemen, make haste to me,  
I'm sure e'er long to have your company.  
As for my epitaph, when I am gone,  
I'll trust no poet, but will write my own.  
Here Nelly lies, who tho' she lived a slattern,  
Yet died a Princess acting in Saint Catharine.' "

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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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According to Oldys, "Miss Gwyn, besides her own part of Valeria, was likewise appointed, in that character, to speak the Epilogue; in performing which, she so captivated the King, who was present the first night of the play, by the humorous turns she gave it, that His Majesty, when she had done, went behind the scenes and carried her off to an entertainment."

This may be true, but, as will be shown, it was not the first time that she entertained her royal lover, for *Tyrannic Love* was produced in the winter of 1669-1670.

Nell Gwyn was at her best in this sort of fooling, and in the following year (1670) scored a great hit by delivering the Prologue to the first part of *Almanzor and Almahide, or, The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards*, in a broad-brimmed hat as big as a cart-wheel. The origin of this eccentric head-wear was not merely a sense of fun; it came about in the following way, related by Waldron in his edition of Downes' "Roscius Anglicanus":

"At the Duke's theatre, Nokes appeared in a hat larger than Pistol's, which took the town wonderful, and supported a bad play by its fine effect. Dryden, piqued at this, caused a hat to be made the circumference of a timber coach wheel; and as Nelly was low of stature, and what the French call *mignonne* or *piquante*, he made her speak under the umbrella of that hat, the brims thereof being spread out horizontally to their full extension. The whole theatre was in a convulsion of applause, nay, the very actors giggled, a circumstance none had observed before. Judge, therefore, what a condition the merriest Prince

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## Nell Gwyn

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alive was in at such a conjuncture ! 'Twas beyond *odso* and *ods fish*, for he wanted little of being suffocated with laughter."

The prologue runs :

" This jest was first of the other house's making,  
And, five times tried, has never fail'd of taking ;  
For 'twere a shame a poet should be kill'd  
Under the shelter of so broad a shield.  
This is that hat, whose very sight did win ye  
To laugh and clap as though the devil were in ye.  
As then, for Nokes, so now I hope you'll be  
So dull, to laugh once more for love of me.  
I'll write a play, says one, for I have got  
A broad-brimm'd hat, and waist-belt, towards a plot.  
Says the other, I have one more large than that,  
Thus they out-write each other with a hat !  
The brims still grew with every play they writ ;  
And grew so large, they cover'd all the wit.  
Hat was the play ; 'twas language, wit, and tale :  
Like them that find meat, drink, and cloth in ale.  
What dulness do these mongrel wits confess,  
When all their hope is acting of a dress !  
Thus, two the best comedians of the age  
Must be worn out, with being blocks o' the stage ;  
Like a young girl, who better things has known,  
Beneath their poet's impotence they groan.  
See now what charity it was to save,  
They thought you liked, what only you forgave ;  
And brought you more dull sense, dull sense much worse  
Than brisk gay nonsense, and the heavier curse.  
They bring old iron and glass upon the stage,  
To barter with the Indians of our age.  
Still they write on, and like great authors show,  
But 'tis as rollers in wet gardens grow  
Heavy with dirt, and gathering as they go.  
May none, who have so little understood,  
To like such trash, presume to praise what's good !  
And may those drudges of the stage, whose fate



Nell Gwyn in the Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards,  
in a broad-brimmed hat as big as a cartwheel.



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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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Is damn'd dull farce more dully to translate,  
Fall under that excise the state thinks fit  
To set on all French wares, whose worst is wit.  
French farce, worn out at home, is sent abroad  
And patch'd up here, is made our English mode.  
Henceforth, let poets, ere allow'd to write,  
Be search'd like duellists before they fight,  
For wheel-broad hats, dull honour, all that chaff,  
Which makes you mourn, and makes the vulgar laugh :  
For these, in plays, are as unlawful arms,  
As, in a combat, coats of mail, and charms."

This exhibition also is said by some of the authorities to have inflamed the King, "her little figure looking so droll as to lead him to take her home in his coach, and so to make her his mistress;" but, as a matter of fact, the date of the beginning of the relations between him and Nell Gwyn is fixed by an entry in Pepys's Diary on January 11, 1668, in which he puts on record that Mrs. Knipp told him that "The King did send several times for Nelly, and she was with him."

It has been related that Charles II. used Mrs. Knight, the actress, as a procuress, and that it was she who was employed to bring Nell Gwyn to him.

" 'Goe, Mrs. Knight,' quoth he, 'and fetch her straight,' "

Etherege makes the King say in *The Lady of Pleasure*; but the employment of a procuress at this period of Nell Gwyn's life was surely supererogatory, for she, who was more or less accessible to all comers who took her fancy or could pay her way for her, was scarcely likely to require much persuasion to accept the addresses of a brilliant and charming monarch who looked upon her with favour.

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## Nell Gwyn

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It is unlikely that Charles II. intended at first to add Nell Gwyn to what may be called his permanent harem. He probably sent for her merely to amuse himself for the moment. Nell's charm, however, duly impressed itself on him, and she was soon installed by him in apartments in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he visited her as the spirit moved him.

Yet, in course of time, her charm subdued him. He came to love her high spirits. "She acted all persons in so lively a manner, and was such a constant diversion to the King, that even a new mistress could not drive her away," Burnet has written. "But, after all, he never treated her with the decencies of a mistress, but rather with the lewdness of a prostitute as she had indeed been to a great many; and therefore she called the King her Charles the Third, since she had been formerly kept by two of that name." The other two, it may be surmised, were Charles Hart and Charles, Lord Buckhurst.

Nell Gwyn was certainly no respecter of persons or even of personages. She was herself, and that was good enough for her—and for a good many others. "She continued to hang on her clothes with her usual negligence when she was the King's mistress," Granger has remarked, "but whatever she did became her."

Charles allowed her every licence, much more than he allowed to any other of his favourites, and this was as well, for she would have taken it all the same. As Etherege wrote of her :

"When he was dumpish, she would still be jocund,  
And chuck the Royal Chin of C[harles] the Second."

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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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Her language was still the language of Lewknor Lane, and like her costume, or her lack of it, it too became her. As Etherege puts it in "Madam Nelly's Complaint : "

" Before great Charles let quacks and seamen lie,  
He ne'er heard swearers like Moll Knight and I :  
Never heard oaths less valued, or less true,  
And yet 'tis said he's paid for swearing too :  
Louder we swore than plundering dragoons,  
S'blood follow'd s'blood, and zounds succeeded zounds."

There is a story, which must be Bowdlerized in the telling here, of how she one day inveigled him to a brothel, where he gave an entertainment. Afterwards she contrived to make him undress, and then, with the other members of the conspiracy, ran away with his clothes. In vain, in discharge of his debt and for some wearing-apparel, he offered as security a valuable ring—all he had on him. The keeper of the house would have none of it. Glass could be made to look like a jewel, he knew, and he was for giving his embarrassed visitor into custody, when fortunately some one recognized His Majesty—and all was well. Such were the humours of the time.

Another and more reputable anecdote is related by Colley Cibber :

" Boman, then a youth, and famed for his voice, was appointed to sing some part in a concert of music at the private lodgings of Mrs. Gwin, at which were only present the King, the Duke of York, and one or two who were usually admitted upon those detached parties of pleasure. When the performance was ended,

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the King expressed himself highly pleased, and gave it extraordinary commendations.

“ ‘Then, sir,’ said the lady, ‘to show you don’t speak like a Courtier, I hope you will make the performers a handsome present.’

“The King said he had no money about him, and asked the Duke if he had any.

“To which the Duke replied, ‘I believe, sir, not above a guinea or two.’

“Upon which the laughing lady, turning to the people about her, and making bold with the King’s common expression, cried :

“ ‘*Od’s fish, what company am I got into?*’ ”

The King would put up with any amount of impudence from her, but defended her from others—though, as a matter of fact, she was extraordinarily able to take care of herself. One such instance has been recorded, the culprit being that Harry Killigrew, who was always in trouble owing to his unruly tongue.

“The younger Killeegree,” Viscountess Campden wrote to Lord Ross, September 21, 1677, “is banished the Court againe for goeing att 4 of the clocke the other morning to Nell Gwin and knocking her up, being drunke, and saying he came from the King to acquaint her with the good niewse of the D[uchess] of Portsmouth’s recovery, and after that raileed her with his abusive tonge extreamly; and the D[uchess] is perfectly well again, and they say will lead a new lyfe, att least has promised it to her ghostly father.”

Shortly after Charles II. took Nell Gwyn into keeping, Sir John Coventry, member for Weymouth,

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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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who was in opposition to the Government, moved (in 1670) to levy a tax on the playhouses. To this, Sir John Birkenhead, speaking against the motion, said that they had been of great pleasure to the King. Coventry then asked, Whether the King's pleasure did lie among the men or the women that acted? This remark greatly angered the King's friends, and a few days later Coventry was dragged out of his coach by a band of bullies, directed by Sir Thomas Sandys and Captain O'Brien (a son of Lord Inchiquin), and his nose slit to the bone. Parliament, zealous of its privilege of frank speaking, was greatly resentful, and in the following January passed what is known as the Coventry Act or the Coventry Maiming Act, the gist of which is given in Andrew Marvell's Letter from Westminster:

"Whoever after the 16th of February next [1671] shall put out the eye, cut the lip, nose, or tongue of any of His Majesty's liege people, upon malice 'forethought, or in short provocation, shall be guilty of felony without benefit of clergy. And whoever shall in any other manner wound or maim any Parliament man, or any of the House of Lords, during their attendance, or their coming or returning from Parliament, shall be imprisoned for a yeare, pay treble damages, to be assessed by the jury, and be deprived and made incapable of all offices whatsoever."

There were those who said that Nell Gwyn was responsible for the outrage, but such an accusation cannot be accepted for a moment. She had no further connection with it than being (jointly with Moll

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## Nell Gwyn

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Davis, it may be presumed) indirectly alluded to by Coventry.

The incident was made the subject of a set of verses, the authorship of which is attributed to Andrew Marvell :

### A BALLAD, CALL'D THE HAYMARKET HECTORS.

#### *Upon the cutting of Sir John Coventry's Nose.*

I sing a woful ditty, of a wound that long will smart-on ;  
And giv'n (the more's the pity) in the realm of Magna Charta.

Youth, Youth, thou'dst better bin slain by thy Foes,  
Than live to be hang'd for cutting a Nose !

Our good King C[harles] the Second, too flippant of treasure and  
moisture,

Stoop'd from the Queen infecund, to a Wench of Orange and  
Oyster ;

Consulting his Catzo,\* he found it expedient  
To waste time in revels with *Nell* the Comedian.

The leacherous vain-glory, of being lim'd with Majesty,  
Mounts up to such a story this Bitchington Travesty,  
That, to equal her Lover, the Baggage must dare  
To be Helen the Second, the cause of a War.

And he, our am'rous Jove, while she lay dry-bobb'd under,  
To repair the defect of his love, must lend her his Lightning and  
Thunder

And for one night prostitutes to her commands  
His *Monmouth* Life-Guards, O'Brien, and Sands.

And now all fear of the *French*, and the pressing need of the Navy,  
Are dwindled into a salt Wench, and *Amo, Amas, Amavi*.

Now he'll venture his Subsidy, so he may cloven try  
In female revenge, the Nose of *Coventry*.

\* Catzo, from the Italian, an opprobrious term for a knavish companion.

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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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Oye *Hay-Market* Hector, how came you thus charm'd,  
To be the dissectors of one poor Nose unarm'd ?  
Unfit to wear Sword, or follow a Trumpet,  
That would brandish your knives at the word of a Strumpet ?

But was't not ungrateful, in *Monmouth*, ap *Sidney*, ap *Carlo*,  
To contrive an act so hateful, O Prince of *Wales* by *Barlow* ?  
For since the kind world had dispens'd with his Mother,  
Might he not well have spared the Nose of *John* Brother ?

Beware all ye Parliamenteers, how each of his Voice disposes :  
*Bay May*\* in the Commons, *Charles Rex* in the Peers, sit telling  
your Fates on your Noses ;  
And decree, at the meeting of every Slut  
Whose Nose shall continue, and whose shall be cut.

If the sister of Rose be a w——e so anointed  
That the Parliament's Nose must for her be disjointed,  
Then should you but name the Prerogative w——e,  
How the Bullets would whistle, the Cannons would roar.

Nell Gwyn did not at once leave the stage when she became the King's mistress.

In the autumn of 1677 Genest states that she acted Alizia in Lord Orrery's *The Black Prince*, but this is unlikely. Pepys saw the play three times, and makes no mention of her ; and from a note in Downes's "Roscius Anglicanus" it seems probable that the part was undertaken by a Mrs. Quin, with whom, in print, Nell Gwyn has occasionally been confused. In September of that year, however, she created Merida in *All Mistaken, or, The Mad Couple*, by the Hon. James Howard. Pepys saw the play on December 28, and recorded :

\* Baptist May (1629-1698) held the office of Keeper of the Privy Purse from 1665. He was in 1683 given the sinecure office of Registrar in Chancery, the reversion of which was given to Nell Gwyn's son, the Duke of St. Albans.

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## Nell Gwyn

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“To the King’s House, and there saw *The Mad Couple*, which is but an ordinary play ; but only Nell’s and Hart’s mad parts are most excellently done, but especially hers, which makes it a miracle to me to think how ill she do any serious part, as, the other day, just like a fool or changeling ; and in a mad part do beyond imitation almost.”

Nell Gwyn was now in high favour at the King’s House—any annoyance that there may have been about the Buckhurst escapade had been forgiven, as much is forgiven to an actress who draws the public to the theatre. In 1668 she played Bellario in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster* and Jacinta in Dryden’s *An Evening’s Love, or, The Mock Astrologer*. In the following year she created Valeria in Dryden’s *Tyrannic Love*. In 1670 she played Almahide in Dryden’s *Conquest of Granada*, the production of which had to be postponed owing to “an interesting event,” and for a similar reason Moll Davis about the same time was unable to appear at the Duke’s Theatre. The “interesting event” in the case of Nell Gwyn was the birth on May 8, of Charles Beauclerk, her elder son by the King, and in the case of Moll Davis, the birth of another royal bastard, who was afterwards styled Lady Mary Tudor.

To the double postponement, Dryden slyly made allusion in the Epilogue to his play when it was performed in the autumn of 1670 :

“Think him not duller for the year’s delay.  
He was prepared, the women were away ;  
And men without their parts can hardly play.



Moll Davis



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## Nell Gwyn becomes Mistress of Charles II

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If they through sickness seldom did appear,  
Pity the virgins of each theatre ;  
For at both houses 'twas a sickly year !  
And pity us, your servants to whose cost  
In one such sickness nine whole months were lost."

In this part Nell Gwyn scored another success, which was recorded by Lord Lansdowne in his " Progress of Beauty " :

" Past is the gallantry, the fame remains  
Transmuted safe by Dryden's lofty strain :  
Granada lost, beheld her pomps restored,  
And Almahide once more by Kings adored."

It is on record that shortly after Nell Gwyn played Panthea in the revival of Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King*, and after that nothing more is known about her stage career.

Historians of the drama say that Nell Gwyn, after an absence of several years, returned to the stage in 1677. It is mentioned that in that year she joined the company at the theatre in Dorset Gardens. The parts attributed to her in 1677 are Angelica Bianca in Mrs. Afra Behn's *The Rover*, Astria in the anonymous pastoral, *The Constant Nymph*, and Thalestris in *The Siege of Babylon*, by Samuel Pordage, and in 1678 Lady Squeamish in Otway's *Friendship in Fashion* and Lady Knowell in Mrs. Afra Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*. Further, it is stated that early in 1682 she was playing at Drury Lane—Sunamire in Southern's *The Loyal Brother* and Queen Elizabeth in Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite, or, The Earl of Essex*, retiring later in that year when the two companies

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## Nell Gwyn

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joined forces. It is, however, practically certain that this is all wrong. It is impossible to believe that Nell Gwyn, who was at that time a power in the land, would have let herself be cast for Queen Elizabeth, a part for which she must have been entirely unsuited. It is probable that the historians have, in this matter, as they have done once or twice in connection with other and earlier cases, confused Nell Gwyn and Mrs. Quin.

Another reason for refusing credence to the story of Nell Gwyn's return to the stage is that in 1675 she was appointed a Lady of the Privy Chamber to the Queen—and a mighty scandalous appointment too.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE HOMES OF NELL GWYN

The birth of her first child.—Lincoln's Inn Fields.—Her house on the north side of Pall Mall.—Her house on the south side of Pall Mall.—"Conveyed free under the Crown."—Her neighbours.—Charles II. visits her there.—No. 38, Prince's Street, now No. 53, Wardour Street.—The deed of covenant.—No apartments in Whitehall.—Nell Gwynne Tavern and Nell Gwynne Cottages in Pimlico.—Other Nell Gwynne taverns.—Bagnigge Wells.—Tradition assigns her a residence at Chelsea, and asserts that she lived at Mill Hill, Leyton and Sunninghill.—Nell Gwyn at Tunbridge Wells.—*The Peckham Frolic*.—Epsom Wells.—Burford House at Windsor.

**I**T was in the apartments in Lincoln's Inn Fields, which the King had provided for her, that Nell Gwyn was, on May 8, 1670, delivered of a son, Charles, the paternity of which was at once acknowledged by the King. He seems, indeed, to have been pleased with this latest addition to the ranks of his natural children, and the mother rose higher and higher in the royal favour.

About the end of the year he moved her to a house in Pall Mall, "east-end, on the north side," on the site of which is now part of the Army and Navy Club. This Club has still in its possession a Nell Gwyn mirror, which is over the fireplace in the visitors' dining-room. This was in Lord de Mauley's house, and is probably genuine. It also boasts a silver fruit knife, with the date 1680, which is said to have belonged to the same

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## Nell Gwyn

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frail lady and is placed in the smoking-room. "As late as the eighteenth century," we read in Thomas Pennant's book on London, "the back room on the ground floor of the old house on this site was covered with looking-glass, as was said to have been the ceiling also. Over the chimney-piece was a picture of Nell Gwyn, while a portrait of her sister hung in another room. The house then belonged to Thomas Brand, of the Hoo, in Herefordshire."

Nell Gwyn did not long occupy the house on the north side of Pall Mall. In the following year she took up her residence on the other side. This house—Pennant is again the authority—"was given by a long lease by Charles the Second to Nell Gwyn, and upon her discovering it to be only a lease under the Crown, she returned him the lease and conveyances, saying that she had always conveyed free under the Crown and always would ; and would not accept it till it was conveyed free to her by an act of Parliament made on and for that purpose. Upon Nelly's death it was sold and has been conveyed free ever since." That it was possible to get through an Act of Parliament for this purpose is a sufficient commentary on the times in which Nell Gwyn lived. The house, afterwards No. 79, was in the middle of the eighteenth century rebuilt and occupied by Dr. Heberden, the famous physician. Subsequently it was at one time occupied by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, even as Mrs. Fitzherbert's house at Brighton was taken over by the Young Men's

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## The Homes of Nell Gwyn

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Christian Association. It is now occupied by an insurance company.

The rate-books of the parish of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields record her residence in Pall Mall from 1670 to her death.

Nell Gwyn had as neighbours Mary ("Moll") Knight, the beautiful singer, who for a little while was a mistress of Charles II. ; Edward Griffin, Treasurer of the Chamber ; and the widow of the third Earl of Portland. The King, of course, was a frequent visitor, and, on one occasion in March, 1671, was accompanied by John Evelyn, who recorded the incident :

" I had a fair opportunity of talking to His Majesty in the lobby next the Queen's side, where I presented him with some sheets of my History. I thence walked with him through St. James's Park to the garden, where I both saw and heard a very familiar discourse between him and Mrs. Nellie, as they call an impudent comedian, she looked out of her garden on a terrace at the top of the walk and he standing on the green walk under it. I was heartily sorry at this scene. Thence the King walked to the Duchess of Cleveland, another lady of pleasure, and curse of our nation."

This garden was not the Mall as is generally assumed, but the King's own garden, as is proved by the Act of Parliament creating St. James's Park in 1685, in which it is recited : " and from St. James's Gate to the said Pall Mall Street, comprehending all the houses, buildings, and yards backwards to the wall, which encloses that part of St. James's Park which

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## Nell Gwyn

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has been lately made into a garden, extending to a house inhabited by Antonio Verrio, painter, lately in the occupation of Leonard Gile, gardener."

There was another house in London which belonged to Nell Gwyn. This was No. 38, Prince's Street. The name of Prince's Street was later abolished, and the entire thoroughfare from Oxford Street to Coventry Street was called Wardour Street, and the property in question became No. 53, Wardour Street. By the deed of Covenant the Covenanter was bound to produce, among other documents, one described as follows :

"Letters Patent of King Charles 2nd, dated 1st Decr., 28th Chas. 2nd, under the Great Seal to Chaffinch [*sic*] & Folkes, 5th and 6th April 1677. Indentures of lease and release between William Chaffinch and Martin Folkes of the first part, Henry, Earl of St. Albans of the second part, and Mrs. Ellen Gwynne, John Mollins & Thomas Grounds, gentlemen, of the third part."

There is no evidence whatever that Nell Gwyn ever lived there. It was probably a present from the King, and she simply enjoyed the rent.

Nell Gwyn's name has been associated with many houses in London and the country, but as regards most of them there is nothing in the way of evidence to connect her with them. It has frequently been stated that after she was appointed to the Household of the Queen, that she was given apartments at Whitehall, but there is no known warrant for this, and it is, indeed, extremely unlikely—though, of

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## The Homes of Nell Gwyn

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course, in her official capacity, she had the entrée to the palace.

Tradition, and nothing more, assigns to Nell Gwyn a residence in the Pimlico Road, and her name is kept fresh in the memory of the neighbourhood by a public-house called the Nell Gwynne Tavern and a passage called Nell Gwynne Cottages.

There is also a Nell Gwynne Inn in Bull Lane, near the western end of the Strand, with its advertisement in the Strand itself, over the entrance to the court.

Bagnigge Wells also made a bid for fame in this connection. Bagnigge House, which adjoined the Wells on the south, certainly had over the chimney-piece of one of the principal rooms the royal arms, the garter, and other heraldic bearings, and between them the bust of a woman in Roman dress let deep into a circular cavity of the wall, which is said to represent Nell Gwyn, who, it is alleged, sometimes stayed there in the summer. According to Cunningham there is a tradition that she came here in order to take the bath in the adjacent Cold Bath Fields, where half a century later a nude statue was shown by the proprietor of the bath as her portrait. The bust was transferred to the Long Room of Bagnigge Wells. A square stone placed over an old Gothic portal, which was taken down in 1757, bore the inscription : " This is Bagnigge House neare the Pinder a Wakefelde, 1680," and when what remained of Bagnigge House and Wells was demolished about 1862, this stone was inserted in the front of a small house, one of a row erected on the site.

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## Nell Gwyn

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Bagnigge Wells, according to Thornbury in his "Old and New London," was a summer residence of Nell Gwyn, where, he says, "near the Fleet, and amid fields, she entertained Charles and his saturnine brother with concerts and merry breakfasts in the careless Bohemian way in which the noble specimen of divine right delighted. The ground where the house stood was then called Bagnigge Vale." It was nearly a century later that the springs in the garden of Bagnigge House were discovered.

Another tradition has it that Nell Gwyn had as a residence a mansion at Chelsea, built by the architect of Chelsea Hospital and afterwards called Sandford House, or Sandford Manor House, and that the road now known as King's Road derived its name from the fact that it was frequently used by Charles II. on his visits to Nell at Sandy End, Chelsea.

Mill Hill claims that Nell Gwyn had a residence there, Littleberries ; and Leyton, in Essex, not to be outdone, has it that she sometimes stayed in a two-storied, bow-windowed house nearly opposite the Vicarage. Sunninghill, in Berkshire, has given the name of Nell Gwyn's Avenue to an avenue of limes, which formerly led to a mansion called King's Wick, but it does not definitely assert that the lady lived there. Lauderdale House, Highgate, now included in Waterlow Park, is by one writer at least made the scene of the "bastard" incident, which will presently be related.

Tunbridge Wells also asserts its claim to Nell Gwyn as a visitor, and Edward Jermingham published in 1799 a three-act comedy, *The Peckham Frolic, or,*

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## The Homes of Nell Gwyn

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*Nell Gwyn*, the scene of which is laid at Peckham, near Tunbridge Wells, where the author tells us, "Charles the Second frequently resided with some select companions." Among the characters are the King, Rochester, Sir Charles Sedley, Tom Killigrew and Nell Gwyn.

There has, however, not been any tradition handed down to associate Nell with this watering-place, except that Charles II. is believed to have gone there. Tunbridge Wells, certainly in the seventies of the seventeenth century, thoroughly established itself as a favourite watering-place. Bath, of course, was easily the first, but it was a long way from the metropolis for short visits, and, besides, its season was the winter, whereas people went to Tunbridge Wells in the summer.

"The Wells" had, indeed, a rival, but it was not Bath, but Epsom, which had the advantage of being very near to London. Reference has already been made to a house at Epsom which Nell Gwyn is said to have occupied. So early as 1673 Epsom secured its niche in literature, when Shadwell produced his comedy, *Epsom Wells*, at Dorset Gardens. It was not until six years later that the Kentish town received similar recognition at the hands of Thomas Rawlins in his *Tunbridge Wells, or, A Day's Courtship*.

There is no doubt that Nell Gwyn stayed at Oxford when Charles II. went there, and Anthony Wood, in his "Life and Times," says clearly that she "lived sometimes in Oxford."

We are on firm ground as regards her residence at

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## Nell Gwyn

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Windsor.\* The King settled on her Burford House, the site of which is now occupied by the Queen's Mews. The original grant was to her for life, and afterwards to her only surviving son, then the Earl of Burford (afterwards Duke of St. Albans) and the heirs male of his body; but this was presently amended to include his heirs female, with ultimate remainder to Nell Gwyn in fee, as is shown by the following legal instrument:

"Chas. the 2<sup>nd</sup> etc. To our r<sup>t</sup> trusty and r<sup>t</sup> wel-beloved Cousin Charles Earle of Dorset and Middlesex and to our trusty and welbeloved S<sup>r</sup> Geo. Hewit Bar<sup>t</sup> S<sup>r</sup> Edw<sup>d</sup> Villiers Kn<sup>t</sup> and Will Chiffinch Esq. greeting. Whereas by certain indentures of lease and release bearing date the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of Sept. in the 32<sup>nd</sup> yeare of our reigne and by our indenture of assignment dated the s<sup>d</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> of September William Chiffinch Esqr. did by and with our privy and direction grant release convey and assigne to you the s<sup>d</sup> Charles E. of Dorset and Middx, S<sup>r</sup> George Hewet Bar<sup>t</sup> and S<sup>r</sup> Edw<sup>d</sup> Villiers Kn<sup>t</sup> and your heirs executors and assigns all that new erected capitall messuage or mansion house now called or knowne by the name of Burford House with the gardens orchards out houses stables and appurtenances thereunto belonging situate and being in New Windsor in the co. of Barks, and by the s<sup>d</sup> deeds the same are declared to be in trust for Ellen Gwyn for and during her life and after her

\* There is a claim put in for the house at Windsor, now known as Old Bank House, situated at the foot of the Hundred Steps, as one of Nell Gwyn's residences. It was built by Sir Christopher Wren, and it is said that she lived there for eight months.

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## The Homes of Nell Gwyn

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decease in trust for Charles Earl of Burford and the heirs males of his body. And for default of such issue in trust for us our heirs and successors for ever. And whereas our intention was the sayd house should have been declared not only with provision for the heirs males but also for the heirs females of the 1<sup>st</sup> E. of Burford and for default of such issue of the sd E. of Burford to and for the use and benefit of the sayd *Ellen Gwynn* and her heirs for ever and not in trust for us our heirs and successors. Our will and pleasure therefore is and we do hereby direct and appoint that you make and declare further trusts and estates of and in the sayd premisses according to our sayd intention herein expressed by such deed and conveyance or conveyances as the said *Ellen Gwynn* or her Councill learned in the law shall approve of. Given at Whitehall the 7<sup>th</sup> day of February 1683.

As Nell Gwyn frequently stayed at Burford House, Charles II. took a considerable interest in its adornment, and by his orders Antonio Verrio, who had done part of the decorations of Windsor Castle, painted the staircase of this mansion. It has also been recorded that one M. Bodivine was between 1675 and 1678 paid £50 "for repairing of Madam Gwin's house." This house is the subject of a large engraving by Leonard Knyff, entitled "A prospect of the House at Windsor belonging to his Grace Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans, Earl of Burford, and Baron of Heddington, Captain of the Honourable Band of Gentlemen Pensioners, Marshall and Surveyor of the Hawks to his Majesty, and one of the Gentlemen of his

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## Nell Gwyn

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Majesty's Bed-chamber." Some little time after the death of Nell Gwyn, Princess Anne and her husband, Prince George of Denmark, lived at Burford House—this was in 1689 and 1690; but it was presently occupied by its owner, the Duke of St. Albans. It is not without interest to note the following entry in the accounts of the Chamberlain of Windsor for 1689: "More for Madam Gwynn's house in the possession of the Prince of Denmark, 15 years in arrear at 2s. per ann." It is pleasant to be able to state that a subsequent entry shows that his Grace paid up the arrears.

In the Muniments of the Dean and Canons of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, there are Leases of a tenement in Priest Street, Windsor, which was let by the Dean and Canons to "Eleanor Gwinn of the Parish of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, one of the Ladys of Her Majestie the Queen's Privy Chamber, 11 December, 1684, and after her decease to Charles, Duke of St. Albans, 18 January, 1692-3." No further information concerning the "tenement" has come to light.

While most people were exceedingly anxious to ingratiate themselves with the King's mistresses, one man stood out as refusing point-blank to have anything whatsoever to do with any one of them. This was Thomas Ken, Prebendary of Winchester, and afterwards Bishop of Bath and Wells.

On March 22, 1683, when Charles was at Newmarket for the races, his house was destroyed by fire. The date is important, because this accident,

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## The Homes of Nell Gwyn

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with the consequent departure of the royal party, is said to have frustrated the Rye House Plot, fixed for eight days later. This plot was to secure the succession to the throne of the Duke of Monmouth in preference to the Duke of York, and it was believed that some of the conspirators projected the assassination of the King and his brother. Monmouth betrayed the others, and was pardoned, though banished from Court, but Lord William Russell and Algernon Sidney were executed.

This incident not unnaturally gave Charles a distaste for Newmarket, and he instructed Christopher Wren to design him a palace at Winchester. During the building he often went there to watch what progress was being made, amusing himself by hunting in the New Forest or fishing in the Itchin.

On one occasion, when Nell Gwyn accompanied him, the official whose duty it was to provide suitable accommodation, fixed on Ken's prebendal house as a lodging for her. Ken refused his consent point-blank.

"A woman of ill-repute," he declared, "ought not to be endured in the house of a clergyman, least of all in that of the King's Chaplain." From this attitude he could not be moved. There was much argument, and, to settle the matter, Ken, so the story goes, put the house in the builders' hands for repairs and had it unroofed.

It was generally thought that Ken had for ever destroyed his chance of preferment, but this proved not to be the case at all. With all his faults, Charles

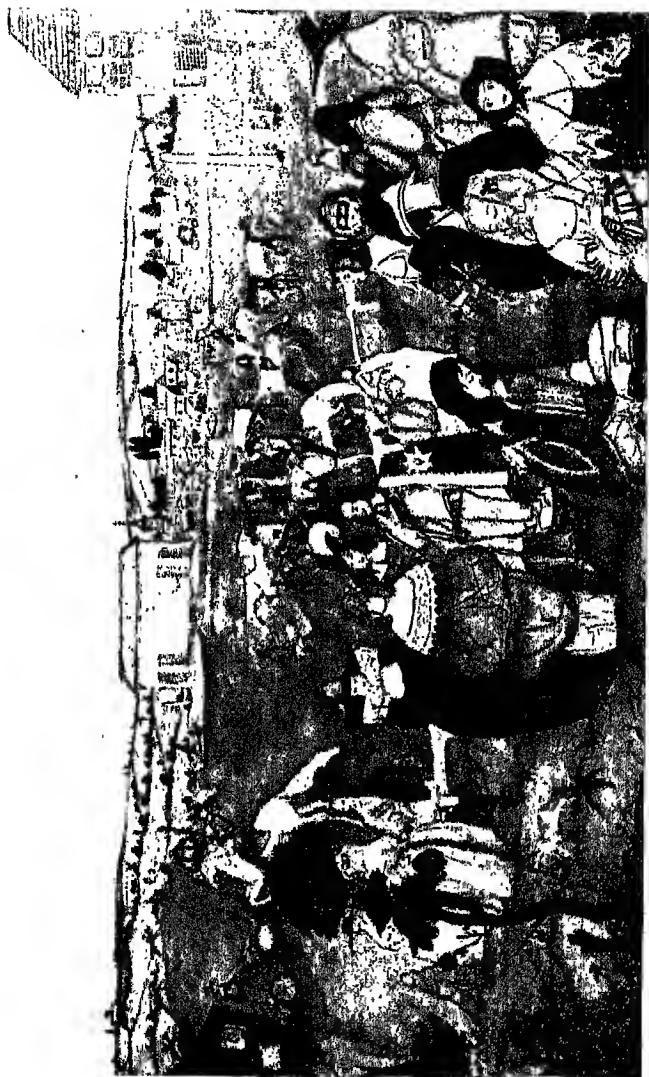
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## Nell Gwyn

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knew an honest man when he met him, and could appreciate him. When, in 1684, Peter Mew was translated from the see of Bath and Wells to Winchester, and many candidates were recommended for the vacancy to the King, he declared: "Od's fish! who shall have Bath and Wells but the little black fellow who would not give poor Nelly a lodging?"

At Winchester, Dr. Meggot, the Dean, was more complaisant than Ken, and Nell Gwyn was lodged first in a room attached to the Deanery, which was called by her name until in 1835 it was pulled down by Dean Rennell, perhaps, it has been suggested, as unnecessarily perpetuating an unsavoury association. Later she was lodged at Avington, some three miles from the city, the seat of that Countess of Shrewsbury whose husband had died in 1668 as the result of a wound received in a duel at Barnes Elms with George, second Duke of Buckingham, when, it is said, she was present disguised as a page and holding the horse of her lover.



Newmarket.



## CHAPTER XV

### NELL GWYN : HER INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Nell Gwyn the least grasping of Charles II.'s mistresses.—Some items of her expenditure.—Her silver bed.—Her sedan chair.—A bill for hire of sedan chairs.—Her silver plate.—Her theatre tickets.—Her financial straits.—"An ill paymaster."—Her letter to Madam Jennings.—Her love of gambling.—Sir John Germaine's proposal—and Nell Gwyn's witty rebuke.—The King's chronic impecuniosity.—His settlements on the Duchess of Cleveland, the Duchess of Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn.—Some special money grants to Nell Gwyn.—She gives a power of attorney to Thomas Fraizer.—The King gives her sister, Rose Foster, a pension on the Irish establishment.—Correspondence with the Duke of Ormonde, etc., concerning the payment of Nell Gwyn's pension.

**O**F all the mistresses of Charles II., Nell Gwyn was the least grasping in the matter of money, though, as a matter of fact, considerable sums were passed to her. Burnet has told us that "Gwyn, the indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a Court, yet continued to the end of the King's life in great favour, and was maintained at a vast expense." He has further put it on record that the Duke of Buckingham told him that when she was first brought to the King she asked only five hundred pounds a year, and the King refused it, but that when she had been a royal favourite for about four years, she had received from the King about sixty thousand pounds.

It is possible to derive some knowledge of Nell

## Nell Gwyn

Gwyn's household from studying a bundle of miscellaneous bills of hers for 1674 and the two following years that came into the hands of Peter Cunningham. They include an account from a silversmith for silver ornaments for a bed, the decorations being such things as King's head, slaves, eagles, crowns and Cupids. But the bill itself is interesting enough to be given in full :

Work done for y<sup>e</sup> righte Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Madame Guinne.

		John Cooqus, siluersmyth his bill.		£ s. d.	
1674.	Deliucred the head of y <sup>e</sup> bedstead weighing 885 onces 12 lb. and I haue received 636 onces 15 dweight so that their is over and aboue of me owne siluer two hundred [and] forty eight onces 17 dweight at 7s. 11d. par once (y <sup>e</sup> siluer being a d't worse par once according y <sup>e</sup> reste) wich comes to			98	10 2
	For y <sup>e</sup> making of y <sup>e</sup> 636 onces 15 d't at 2s. 11d. par once, comes to			92	17 3
			onces. dweight.		
	Deliucred y <sup>e</sup> kings head weighing	197	5		
	one figure weighing	445	15		
	y <sup>e</sup> other figure with y <sup>e</sup> caracter weighing	428	5		
	y <sup>e</sup> slaues and y <sup>e</sup> reste belonging unto it	255			
	y <sup>e</sup> two Eagles weighing	169	10		
	one of the crowne[s] weighing	94	5		
	y <sup>e</sup> second crowne weighing	97	10		
	y <sup>e</sup> third crowne weighing	90	2		
	y <sup>e</sup> fowerd crowne weighing	82			
	one of y <sup>e</sup> Cupids weighing	121	8		
	y <sup>e</sup> second boye weighing	101	10		
	y <sup>e</sup> third boye weighing	93	15		
	y <sup>e</sup> fowered boye weighing	88	17		
	Altogether two thousand two hundred sixty five onces 2d wight of sterling siluer at 8s. par once, comes to	906	0 10		
	Paid for y <sup>e</sup> Essayes of y <sup>e</sup> figures and other things into y <sup>e</sup> tower		0 5 0		

## Her Income and Expenditure

	£	s.	d.
Paid for iacob haalle [Jacob Hall] dansing upon y <sup>e</sup> robbe [rope] of Weyer Worck [wicker-work] . . .	1	10	0
For y <sup>e</sup> cleinsing and brunisching a sugar box, a pepper box, a mustard pott and two kruyzes . . .	0	12	0
For mending y <sup>e</sup> greatte siluer andyrons . . .	0	10	0
Paid to y <sup>e</sup> cabbenet maker for y <sup>e</sup> greatte bord for y <sup>e</sup> head of the bedstead and for y <sup>e</sup> other bord that comes under it and . . . boorring the wholles into y <sup>e</sup> head . . .	3	0	0
Paid to Mr. Consar for karuing y <sup>e</sup> said bord . . .	1	0	0
For y <sup>e</sup> bettering y <sup>e</sup> sodure wich was in the old bedstead . . .	5	3	7
Paid to y <sup>e</sup> smid for y <sup>e</sup> 2 yorne hoops and for y <sup>e</sup> 6 yorn baars krampes and nealles . . .	1	5	0
Paid for y <sup>e</sup> wood denpied de staall for one of y <sup>e</sup> figures . . .	0	4	6
Paid y <sup>e</sup> smith for a hooock to hang up a branche candlestick . . .	0	2	0
Paid to y <sup>e</sup> smith for y <sup>e</sup> baars kramps and nealles to hold up y <sup>e</sup> slaues . . .	0	5	0
Given to me Journey man by order of Madame Guinne . . .	1	0	0
Paid to y <sup>e</sup> smyth for y <sup>e</sup> yorn worck to hold up y <sup>e</sup> Eagles and for y <sup>e</sup> two hooocks to hold the bedstead again the wall . . .	0	3	0
Paid for y <sup>e</sup> pied de stalle of Ebony to hold up the 2 georses . . .	1	10	0
For y <sup>e</sup> mending of y <sup>e</sup> goold hower glasse . . .	0	2	6
Deliuered two siluer bottels weighing 37 ounces 17 d't at 8s. par oncc, comes to . . .	15	2	9
Paid for y <sup>e</sup> other foot to hold up y <sup>e</sup> other figure . . .	0	4	6
For sodering y <sup>e</sup> wholles and for repairing mending and cleinsing the two figures of Mr. Traherne his making . . .	3	0	0
For y <sup>e</sup> making of a crowne upon one of y <sup>e</sup> figures . . .	1	0	0
Giuen to me iourney man by order of Madame Guinne . . .	1	0	0
Deliuered a handel of a kneif weighing 11 dweight more then y <sup>e</sup> old one wich comes with y <sup>e</sup> making of it to . . .	0	5	10
For y <sup>e</sup> cleinsing of eight pictures . . .	0	10	0
	<u>£1,135</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>

## Nell Gwyn

There have been preserved bills for a French coach and for a great *cipher* from the chariot painter; for large looking-glasses; for cleansing and burnishing the warming-pan; for furniture and table expenses; for white satin petticoats and white and red satin nightgowns; for scarlet satin shoes covered with silver lace, and a pair of satin shoes laced over with gold for "Master Charles," her son, and a fine "landskip fan"; for kilderkins of strong ale, ordinary ale, and "a barrel of eights"; and for oats and beans, and "charey" oranges at threepence each—which was cheaper than could in earlier days have been purchased from Nell Gwyn herself at the playhouse.

We have also some bills for Nell Gwyn's sedan-chair :

June 17, 1675.		£	s.	d.
The body of the chaire . . . . .		3	10	0
the best neats leather to cover the outside . . . . .		3	10	0
600 inside nailes, coulered and burnishd . . . . .		0	11	0
600 guilt with water gold at 5s. per cent . . . . .		1	10	0
1200 outside nailes, the same gold, at 8s. per cent . . . . .		4	16	0
300 studds, the same gold . . . . .		1	16	0
2000 halfe rooffe nailes, the same gold . . . . .		1	14	0
200 toppit nailes, same gold . . . . .		3	14	0
5 sprigs for the top, rich guilt . . . . .		4	0	0
a haspe for the doore, rich guilt . . . . .		1	10	0
ffor change of 4 glasses . . . . .		2	0	0
2 pound 5s. for one new glasse, to be abated out of that ffor a broken glasse 15s. . . . .		1	10	0
ffor guilding windows and irons . . . . .		1	5	0
Serge ffor the bottom . . . . .		0	2	0
canuisse to put vnder the leather . . . . .		0	8	0
all sorts of iron nailes . . . . .		0	5	0
workmanship, the chaire inside and outside . . . . .		2	10	0

34 11 0

Reict. dated 13 July, 1675, for "30£ in full discharge."

## Her Income and Expenditure

That Nell Gwyn did not always employ her own sedan is evident from the following bill :

	£	s.	d.
For careing you to Mrs. Knights and to Madam Younges, and to Madam Churchfills, and wating four oures .	0	5	0
For careing you the next day, and wating seven oures .	0	7	6
For careing you to Mrs. Knights, and to Mrs. Cassells, and to Mrs. Churchills, and to Mrs. Knights . . .	0	4	0
For careing one Lady Sanes to y <sup>e</sup> play at White Halle, and wayting . . . . .	0	3	6
For careing you yesterday, and wayting eleven oures .	0	11	6
Y <sup>e</sup> some is . . . . .	1	11	6

13 October, 1675.

Recd. them of Tho. Groundes in full of these  
Bills and all other demands from Madam } £2.—.—  
Gwin,

by me William Calow.

Nell Gwyn had a passion for silver plate, which on one occasion at least excited the admiration of a burglar, as there appeared in the *London Gazette* for January 3, 1678, the following advertisement :

“All goldsmiths and others to whom our silver plate may be sold, marked with the cypher E.G., flourished, weighing about eighteen ounces, are desired to apprehend the bearer thereof, till they give notice to Mr. Robert Johnson, in Heathcock Alley, Strand, over against Durham Yard, or to Mrs. Gwin’s porter in the Pell Mell, by whom they shall be rewarded.”

It may be accepted that there was no “free list” at the theatre in those days, for there are accounts for side-boxes for Nell Gwyn at the King’s House and the Duke’s Theatre, though as these were settled

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## Nell Gwyn

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by the Treasury it was no great matter to the lady. Usually she took a party with her at her own—or the Treasury's—expense. It may be noted that between September and December, 1674, she went four times to see *The Tempest*, and in June, 1675, was present at a performance of *King Lear*.

Nell Gwyn, like the King and his other favourites, never apparently had any ready money, and she was, therefore, probably right when, in the following letter, she says that “the King’s Mistresses are accounted ill paymasters.”

“These for Madam Jennings over against the  
Tub Tavern in Jermyn Street, London.

“WINDSOR, BURFORD HOUSE,  
“April 14, 1684.

“MADAM,

“I have received y<sup>r</sup> Letter, and I desire y<sup>e</sup> would speake to my Ladie Williams\* to send me the Gold Stuffe, & a Note with it, because I must sign it, then she shall have her money y<sup>e</sup> next Day of Mr. Trant; pray tell her Ladieship, that I will send her a Note of what Quantity of Things I ’le have bought, if her Ladieship will put herselfe to y<sup>e</sup> Trouble to buy them; when they are bought I will sign a Note for her to be payd.

“Pray Madam, let y<sup>e</sup> Man goe on with my Sedan, and send Potvin† and Mr. Coker down to me, for I want

\* “My Ladie Williams” (died 1689) was Susanna, daughter of Sir Thomas Skipwith, Bart., of Mettingham, co. Lincoln, who married in 1673 Sir John Williams, Bart., of Marnhull, co. Dorset (1642–1680).

† Potvin was an upholsterer.

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## Her Income and Expenditure

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them both. The Bill is very dear to boyle the Plate, but necessity hath noe Law. I am afraid M<sup>m</sup>. you have forgott my Mantle, which you were to line with Musk Colour Sattin, and all my other Things, for you send me noe Patterns nor Answer.

“Monsieur Lainey is going away.

“Pray send me word about your son Griffin, for his Majestie is mighty well pleased that he will goe along with my Lord Duke. I am afraid you are so much taken up with your owne House that you forget my Business. My service to dear Lord Kildare, and tell him I love him with all my heart.

“Pray M<sup>m</sup>. see that Potvin brings now all my Things with him : My Lord Duke’s bed, &c. if he hath not made them all up, he may doe that here, for if I doe not get my Things out of his Hands now, I shall not have them until this time twelvemonth. The Duke brought me down with him my Crochet of Diamonds ; and I love it the better because he brought it. Mr. Lumley and everie body else will tell you that it is the finest Thing that ever was seen. Good M<sup>m</sup>. speake to Mr. Beaver to come down too, that I may bespeake a Ring for the Duke of Grafton before he goes into France.

“I have continued extreme ill ever since you left me, and I am soe still. I have sent to London for a Dr. I believe I shall die. My service to the Duchess of Norfolk, and tell her, I am as *sick* as her Grace, but do not know what I ayle, although shee does. . . .

“Pray tell my Ladie Williams that the King’s Mistresses are accounted ill paymasters, but shee shall

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## Nell Gwyn

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have her Money the next Day after I have the stuffe.

"Here is a sad slaughter at Windsor, the young mens taking y<sup>r</sup> Leaves and going to France, and, although they are none of my Lovers, yet I am loath to part with the men.

"Mrs. Jennings, I love you with all my Heart and soe good bye.

"E. G.

"Let me have an Answer to this Letter."

A copy of this interesting letter was sent by the antiquary, the Rev. William Cole, to Horace Walpole, who acknowledged the receipt of it on January 9, 1775, when he wrote : "I every day intended to thank you for the copy of Nell Gwyn's letter, till it was too late ; the gout came and made me moult my goose quill. The letter is very curious, and I am as well content as with the original."

Cunningham was unaware who was the Madam Jennings to whom it was written. Mr. H. Lavers Smith (whose opinion is given in Mr. Goodwin's edition of "The Story of Nell Gwyn") thinks that she may be Mrs. Frances Jennings, mother of Frances, who married the Earl and titular Duke of Tyrconnel, and Sarah, who married the Duke of Marlborough. This would explain the reference to "your son Griffin," who would be Edward Griffith, who married the third daughter, Barbara.

Nell Gwyn, though she left, so it is believed, a handsome fortune, was always in financial trouble. Unused to money in her youth, she had no sense of its

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## Her Income and Expenditure

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value. Much she gave away, more she squandered, and the basset-table cost her dear. It is said that at one sitting she lost at cards five thousand guineas to Madame de Mazarin.

Gambling was, indeed, one of the vices of the Court of Charles II., though it is said on good authority that the King himself was no gambler, and never won or lost more than a few pounds at a sitting. Nor did his brother, the Duke of York, indulge in heavy play. The Queen, however, was rather addicted to high stakes, and was especially fond of ombre and quadrille, but she played more for the amusement, for the relief it gave her from *ennui*, than for the stake. The excessive gamblers in the immediate royal circle were the Duchess of Portsmouth and the Duchess of Mazarin, who had everything to win and nothing to lose—their losses fell in the first place on the King and in the second on the country they had adopted.

There is, in connection with Nell Gwyn's gaming, a story at once illustrative of her ready wit and of her devotion to the King. A long run of bad luck deprived her of all her ready money and left her heavily in debt to Sir John Germaine. "He," it is recorded, "took the advantage of making such a proposal for the easy payment thereof as may well be guessed at by her answer, when she replied, she was no such sportswoman as to lay the dog where the deer should lie."

It was not always easy for the King to find money for Nell Gwyn and his other mistresses. In 1673

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## Nell Gwyn

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Charles II. was himself heavily in debt by reason of the Exchequer being closed in the previous year, and on September 28 Dr. Henry Stubbs wrote to the Earl of Kent that neither Madame de K  roualle's, nor the Duchess of Cleveland's, nor Nell Gwyn's warrants would be accepted.

"I am told that his Majesty complaining that he wanted money," Ursula Wolrich wrote to her daughter on March 4, 1675, "Nell Gwyn should make answer, if he would take her advice she doubted not his Majesty should be supplied; he asking which way, she told him his Parliament being to sitt, he should treat them as a French rague [the Duchess of Portsmouth], Scotts collopes [Lord Lauderdale], and a calves head [Lord Sunderland], at which his Majesty laughed and was well pleased."

Times improved, and the King, who was as generous as he was improvident, was soon able to come to the rescue of the ladies in distress. We hear something of this in a letter from Andrew Marvell to Sir Henry Thompson, dated December 19, 1674 :

"You have heard doubtlesse that the Duchess of Portsmouth had  10,000 a yeare settled out of the Wine Licences, she of Cleveland having chosen hers out of the Excise as the more secure and legall fonds. The Dutchesse of Portsmouth is in deep mourning for the Chevalier de Rohan as being forsooth of kin to that family. Her sister was on Thursday married to the Earl of Pembroke, he being pretty well recovered from his . . . The King pays the portions. There is also  4,000 a year settled on Nell's children."

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## Her Income and Expenditure

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The grant to Nell Gwyn and her children was, not four thousand, but five thousand pounds a year. The warrant, charging this on the Exchequer, is still in existence :

“ Charles the Second, by the grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith &c. To the Commissioners of Our Treasury now being, to the Treasurer Under-Treasurer and Commissioners of Our Treasury for the time being, Greeting. Our will and pleasure is, And Wee doe hereby authorise and require you, out of Our Treasure now or hereafter being or remaineing in the Receipt of Our Exchequer, to pay or cause to be paid unto Eleanor Gwyn or her Assignes the Annuity or yearly Summe of Five Thousand pounds, dureing Our pleasure, for and towards the Support and maintenance of herselfe and Charles Earl of Burford, To be received by her, the said Eleanor Gwyn quarterly, Att the foure most usuall feasts in the yeare by equall porcions. The first payment to begin from the Feast of the Birth of Our Lord God last One Thousand Six hundred Seaventy Eight, and these Our Letters shall be your sufficient Warrant and Discharge in that behalfe. Given under Our Privy Seale at Our Pallace of Westminster the Eleaventh of June in the One and Thirtieth Year of Our Reign.

“ Irrotulatur in Officio  
Auditoris Receptac Scac-  
carii domini Regis XVj<sup>to</sup>  
Junij, 1679.

“ Irrotulatur in Officio  
Clerici Pellium  
XVIIj<sup>to</sup> die Junij, 1679.”

There are, in the ninth Report of the Historical

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## Nell Gwyn

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Manuscripts Commission, entries concerning Secret Service money to April 30, 1675.

"February 4. Paid to Mrs. Helen Gwyn, £1,000.

"March 25. Paid to the Duchess of Portsmouth, £2,000, and to Mrs. Hellen Gwyn, £1,000.

"More ordered to be paid to Mrs. Gwin, £500."

There is, in the same Report, a reference to a grant of £16,000 to Nell Gwyn.

Evidently realizing that she could not manage her own affairs, she placed them in the hands of her lawyer, Thomas Fraizer, and gave him the following Power of Attorney :

"Be it knowne unto all men by these presents, that I Ellinor Gwyn of the parish of St. Martins in the Fields in the County of Middlesex Spinster (for good causes and considerations mee hereunto moving) have made, named, constituted, ordayned and appointed and by these presents, doe make, name, constitute, ordaine and appoint and in my place and stead put James Fraizer of Westminster in the said County, Gent., my true and lawfull Attorney for me and in my name and to my use to aske, demand, receive and take, of and from any person or persons whome the payment thereof shall concerne, as well as all such Arreares and summe and summes of money as is due, owing and in arreare unto me upon my Annuities, pentions, or yearly profitts granted unto me by his Majestie's Exchequer or elsewhere, As alsoe all such summe or summes of money as shall from time to time hereafter become due and payable unto me for and in respect of the same.

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## Her Income and Expenditure

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"And I do hereby give and grant unto my said Attorney all my full power, whole right, and lawfull Authority upon the Receipt of any summe or summes of money to give Acquittances or other discharge needfull and requisite, either in my name or in his owne, to any person or persons whome the payment thereof shall concern as aforesaid, And generally to Act and agitate all things in and about the receipt of the premises as fully and effectually to all intents and purposes as I myselfe might or could doe the same were I in person present, Rattifying, conferring and Allowing all and whatsoever my said Attorney shall lawfully doe or cause to be done in the premisses firmly by these presents.

"In wittnesse whereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seale this first day of June, In the yeare of our Lord God one thousand six hundred and eighty, Annoque Regni Regis Caroli Secundi nunc Angliae, vc. Tricesimo Secundo."\*

The following letters give some idea of the troubles against which Nell Gwyn had to contend. From the recently published correspondence it is clear that she had prevailed upon the King to give her sister, Rose Foster, a pension on the Irish Establishment. It may be mentioned that Sir Robert Howard was Auditor of the Exchequer, the Duke of Ormonde Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the Earl of Arran Lord Deputy of Ireland. The Earl of Ossory was the eldest son of the Duke of Ormonde.

\* "A Memorial of Nell Gwynne and Thomas Otway the Dramatist," by William Henry Hart, F.S.A.

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## Nell Gwyn

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SIR ROBERT HOWARD TO THE DUKE OF ORMONDE.

Exchequer, *July 15, 1679.*

Mrs. Nelly has commanded me to let you know that her agent, Mr. Melish, has not yet completed her pension for the Michaelmas half-year, and also sends her word that he has no hopes when to receive the Lady [Day] half-year last part, for that there is a stop upon it. She begs your Grace's favour in this, and that you would please to command any of your servants to let me know what the condition of it is, and what she may expect, presuming she shall find your kindness enough to assist her in this particular, and has commanded me to assure your Grace that nothing would please her better than to have a share in serving your Grace.\*

SIR ROBERT HOWARD TO THE DUKE OF ORMONDE.

London, *November 12, 1679.*

By reason of Mr. Mylius his unjuste ill conduct of Mrs. Gwinn's affairs, I have been necessitated to send one Mr. Alexander Adair, and to contribute a new pension, one Mr. St. Vast, to look after the business, and to call Mr. Mylius to an account, and return such moneys as are due to the Exchequer. Mrs. Gwin has humbly to desire your Grace that if there be any application made to you in her behalf, that you would be pleased to help her by your commands. She presents you with her real acknowledgments for all your favours, and protests she would write in her own hand, but her wild characters would distract you.

\* Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 155. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

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## Her Income and Expenditure

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This, my Lord, was her own natural notion when I showed her your Grace's kind return upon the King's letter, since which I have not heard anything from Mr. Mylius, which gives me some apprehension of him, and caused my sending a messenger on purpose.\*

EARL OF OSSORY TO THE DUKE OF ORMONDE.

London, *December 2, 1679.*

This day I had some discourse with Sir Robert Howard concerning Mrs. Nelly's pretension to some lands and houses pretended to belong to my Lord of Dungannon. I entreated him to write unto you what he thought might be said, as if you were not ready to give a just despatch unto that affair, and more, I undertook that you would give him all the satisfaction you could; which I entreat you to do, because I know the King is set on the thing, intending it as a settlement for my Lord of Burford.†

THE DUKE OF ORMONDE TO THE EARL OF OSSORY.

Dublin, *December 24, 1679.*

You may assure Sir Robert Howard that Mrs. Gwin's business concerning Dundalk and Carlingford is done so far as it depends on me, and beg his pardon for me that I do not at this time give him an account of it myself.‡

ELLEN GWYN TO THE DUKE OF ORMONDE.

*September 4, 1682.*

This is to beg a favour of your Grace, which I hope you will stand my friend in. I lately got a friend of

\* Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 237. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

† Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 246. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

‡ Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 246. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

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## Nell Gwyn

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mine to advance me on my Irish pension half a year's payment for last Lady Day, which all people have received but me, and I drew bills upon Mr. Laurence Steele, my agent, for the payment of the money, not thinking but that long before this the bills had been paid; but contrary to my expectation I last night received advice from him that the bills are protested, and he cannot receive any money without your Grace's positive order to the Farmers for it.

Your Grace formerly upon the King's letter, which this enclosed is the copy of, was so much mine and Mrs. Forster's friend as to give necessary orders for our payments notwithstanding the stop. I hope you will oblige me now upon this request, to give your directions to the Farmers, that we may be paid our arrears and what is growing due and you will oblige, etc.\*

ELLEN GWYN TO THE EARL OF ARRAN.

*November 26, 1682.*

I hope your Lordship will now oblige me so much as to stand my friend. I have, with much importunity, got the Lords of the Treasury to give an order to my Lord Ormond to cause the arrears of my pension stopped in Ireland to be paid what is due to me to last Michaelmas with my sister's Mrs. Forster's, and others whom their letter mentions. My agent is Mr. Laurence Steele, to whom I have sent this letter to deliver to your Lordship. Hoping for my sake you will be pleased to give him a speedy despatch in this business, and oblige yours, etc.†

\* Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 436. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

† Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 433. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

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## Her Income and Expenditure

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EARL OF ARRAN TO THE DUKE OF ORMONDE.

Dublin, *December 5, 1682.*

I have had a letter last post from the Lords of the Treasury by his Majesty's directions ordering me to take off the suspensions of Mrs. Gwyn and some others' pensions, which I shall do.\*

\* Ormonde MSS., N.S., VI., 489. (Historical MSS. Commission.)

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FIRST DUKE OF ST. ALBANS AND HIS DESCENDANTS

Nell Gwyn's elder son.—The struggle for titles.—"You little bastard."—Charles Beauclerk created Earl of Burford.—Educated at Paris.—Created Duke of St. Albans.—The Duke a favourite of fortune.—Sinecure offices bestowed on him.—Master Falconer of England.—Registrar of the Court of Chancery.—His marriage.—The Duchess of St. Albans.—His later life.

**T**HERE was, as a matter of course, much jealousy between the mothers of the King's natural children, but Nell, though as eager for her sons' position in life, seems to have taken matters easily. Anyhow, she did not unduly pester her lover, and trusted to time to put things right for them. There is an interesting letter on this point of the date of August 5, 1675, written by William Fall to Sir Ralph Verney, which runs :

"I do not hear that Nell's son is to have any honour at all ; but there are to be three dukcs, viz., Lord Southampton, Lord Euston, and the Duchess of Portsmouth's first son by the King to be Duke of Richmond, Lenox, and Earl of March, by the name of Charles Stuart, etc., these last two had had their patents before this time, had not Lady Cleaveland opposed it, for she is resolved that her younger son shall not take the place of the elder, nor Duke of Richmond either."

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## Duke of St. Albans and His Descendants

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The idea of the exclusion of her elder boy in this honours list may well have angered Nell, who was never afraid of speaking her mind. The story is told by Grange in his "Biographical History" that one day when the King was with her, and the little boy came up to her, she addressed him as, "You little bastard." "Why do you call him that, Nelly?" Charles asked. "Indeed," she retorted, "I have no better name to give him." Another version says that she threatened to throw the boy out of the window in case he did not at once confer a title on him.

Anyhow, whether there is or is not any foundation for the anecdote, Charles, on December 27, 1676, gave him the name of Charles Beauclerk, and created him Baron Heddington and Earl of Burford, both in the county of Oxford—with a special remainder failing heirs of his body to his younger natural brother James. James was born in Pall Mall on Christmas Day, 1671, and after his brother was raised to the peerage, he was known as Lord James Beauclerk. He died at Paris in September, 1680.

The little Earl attracted the King, who took a great interest in him, and when he was twelve years old, thought to send him to be educated for a while at Paris, and to place him in the custody of Lord Preston, who had recently succeeded Henry Savile as Envoy Extraordinary in that city. There has been preserved among the Ormonde papers the following letter, dated November 20, 1682, from Gaye Legge to Lord Preston :

"His Majesty is extremely fond of my Lord

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## Nell Gwyn

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Burforde, and seems much concerned in his education, and he being now of an age fit to be bred in the world hath resolved to trust him wholly in your hands ; no impertinent body shall be troublesome to you, nor anybody but whom you approve of to wait on him. I am to be your solicitor for providing money and all things necessary for him, and I hope by it to establish your other payments better than otherways we could have compassed. I told his Majesty you would be forced to take a larger house, and your expense must needs be much increased by this ; he acknowledged it, and bid me take care that my Lord Burforde should have an appointment ready provided by you in your own house, so that I hope you may compass your own rent free, if your house already will accommodate it, or else that you take a better upon this occasion ; masters must be provided for him, the best can be got of all sorts, but more particularly the King would have him study mathematics, and in that fortification, and that when the King of France moves in any progresses he constantly go with you to view all places in France etc. Mylord, you see by this I am going to bread a bird to pick out my ownes [*sic*] eyes, but I owe his Majesty all I have in gratitude, and will by the help of God study all the ways I am able to make him all the return imaginable. Pray fail not to write to the King by the next post."

The Earl of Burford was, on January 10, 1684, created Duke of St. Albans. It is interesting to note that this was eight days after the death, unmarried, of Henry Jermyn, Earl of St. Albans. St. Albans

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## Duke of St. Albans and His Descendants

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as a title has always been popular, and this was the fourth creation with that style. On the following Easter Day the young Duke, with the Duke of Northumberland and the Duke of Richmond, two other natural sons of the King, accompanied Charles II. when he made his offering at the Altar at Whitehall, the three boys entering before him within the rails.

At this time he was, according to Evelyn, "a very pretty boy;" but Macky describes him twenty years later as "of a black complexion" and "very like King Charles." Macky adds—and this may as well be said here as anywhere—that "he is a gentleman every way *de bon naturel*, well bred, doth not love business, is well affected to the constitution of his country."

In 1687, when James II. was on the throne, it was rumoured that the Duke was going to Hungary, there to enter the Roman Catholic Church, so that "the fraternity," as the natural sons of Charles II. were called, "would be on the same foot or give way as to their advantageous stations." His mother's death occurred before this project was carried out; and nothing more was heard of it. This, perhaps, was fortunate, because in the following year James fled the country and William and Mary, staunch Protestants, reigned in his stead.

The Duke of St. Albans was a favourite of fortune. His father made ample provision for him. As has been said, he settled a handsome income on Nell Gwyn and her children; Burford House, of course, came to him at his mother's death, and he gave the elder

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## Nell Gwyn

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boy the reversion of the sinecure offices of Master Falconer of England and Registrar of the Court of Chancery, both to be hereditary, worth some £1,500 a year, and these came to him, on the death of the holders, in 1688 and 1698 respectively.

According to tradition, Charles II., anxious to make the lad's future secure at the least possible expense to himself, arranged, while the lady was still a child, the betrothal of the Duke to Lady Diana de Vere, eldest daughter and eventually sole heiress of Aubrey, twentieth Earl of Oxford of the De Vere line. The marriage took place on April 13th, 1694, and the Duchess, a celebrated beauty, bore him eight sons; she survived until 1742.

Kneller painted the Duchess, and she is further commemorated in the annals of the Kit-Cat Club, for Lord Halifax wrote a verse about her for one of the toasting-glasses :

" The line of Vere so long renown'd in arms  
Concludes with lustre in St. Albans' charms,  
Her conquering eyes have made their race compleat ;  
They rose in valour and in beauty set."

The Duke had a not undistinguished career as a soldier, serving in 1688 in the Imperial army against the Turks, and being present at the taking of Belgrade; in 1693 he took part, under William III., in the campaign of Landen, and in the following year and again in 1697 he went as a volunteer to Flanders. He was, in 1694, given by the Crown a pension of £2,000 a year, half of which was paid out of the ecclesiastical first fruits. William appointed him

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## Duke of St. Albans and His Descendants

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Captain of the Gentlemen Pensioners in 1693. In 1712 the new Tory Ministry secured his dismissal. He was, however, reinstated by George I. two years later, and held the post until his death in 1726. He was made a Knight of the Garter in 1718. A creditable, if not a glorious, career.

A brief record may, perhaps, be given of the children of the Duke of St. Albans and the grandchildren of Nell Gwyn.

The eldest was Charles. He was born on April 6, 1696, and thirty years later succeeded to the dukedom. He was, in 1730, constituted Governor of Windsor Castle and Warden of the Forest of Windsor, being appointed at the same time a Lord of His Majesty's Bedchamber. He married in 1722 Lucy, eldest daughter and co-heir of Sir John Werden, Bart., of Leyland and Cholmeaton, by whom he had issue, one daughter, Diana, who married the Hon. and Rev. Shute Barrington, and one son, George, who succeeded to the dukedom on his father's death in 1751. He survived until 1786. The third Duke was his son, who died without issue.

The second son, William, was born in 1698, and married on the same day as his elder brother a sister of his brother's bride, Charlotte, daughter and co-heir of Sir John Werden, Bart. He died in 1732, leaving issue, two daughters and one son, Charles, who served in the army. Charles married, and left an only surviving son, who succeeded in 1786 as fourth Duke.

The third son, Verè, was born in 1699, and, serving with distinction in the Navy, was created in 1750

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## Nell Gwyn

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Baron Vere of Hanworth. He married in 1736 Mary, daughter and co-heir of Thomas Chambers of Hanworth, by whom he had issue, two daughters and one son, Aubrey, who in 1687 succeeded as fifth Duke. Aubrey's son, also named Aubrey, succeeded in 1802 as sixth Duke.

The fourth son, Henry, was born in 1701. He went into the army and became colonel of the 31st Foot. He married in 1739 Martha, daughter and heir of Neville, Lord Lovelace, and by her had issue, six daughters and a son. He died in his sixtieth year.

The fifth son, Sidney, was born in 1703. He entered Parliament and was appointed Vice-Chancellor to the King. In 1736 he married Mary, daughter of Thomas Norris, of Speke, in Lancashire, and died eight years later. Of this marriage there was issue, one son and three daughters. The son was Topham Beauclerk, beloved of Johnson, who appears frequently in the pages of Boswell. He had a magnificent library of some 30,000 volumes, which was especially rich in English plays, English history, books of travel and scientific works. He seems to have been the only Beauclerk who had literary tastes. He married in 1768 Lady Diana Spencer, eldest daughter of the second Duke of Marlborough, immediately after she was divorced by her first husband, Frederick St. John, second Viscount Bolingbroke, nephew and heir of the famous Lord Bolingbroke. Topham Beauclerk died in 1780; his widow survived him twenty-eight years.

The sixth son, George, born in 1704, entered the

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## Duke of St. Albans and His Descendants

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army and rose to the rank of lieutenant-general. He married Margaret Bainbridge, and died in 1768 without issue.

The seventh son, James, born in 1702, entered the Church and became Bishop of Hereford. He lived to the age of eighty-five. He was the only one of the eight sons of the first Duke who did not marry.

The youngest son, Aubrey, was born in 1711; married Catherine, daughter of Sir Henry Newton. He was a distinguished naval officer. He was killed in 1741 in the attack on the *Boca Chica*. A monument to his memory was erected in Westminster Abbey, and a pension was conferred upon his widow, who survived him fourteen years. There were no children of the marriage.

Aubrey, sixth Duke of St. Albans, who died in 1815, was succeeded by his only son, another Aubrey, who was only a few months old. The seventh Duke died early in the following year, when his uncle, William, second son of the fifth Duke, inherited the title, which he enjoyed for ten years. He was succeeded by his eldest son, William Aubrey de Vere, whose first wife was the well-known actress, Harriet Mellon, the widow of Thomas Coutts, the banker. The Duchess died without issue in 1837, and two years later the Duke married again, and the son of the second marriage, William Amelius Aubrey de Vere, succeeded in 1849 as tenth Duke. The present holder of the title, Charles Victor Albert Aubrey de Vere, is his son, and inherited in 1898.

The arms of the family, as described by Burke,

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## Nell Gwyn

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are : Quarterly : 1st and 4th, France and England, quarterly ; 2nd, Scotland ; 3rd, Ireland ; over all, a baton sinister, gu., charged with three roses, arg., seeded and barbed, ppr. 2nd and 3rd, DE VERE, quarterly gu. and or, in the 1st quarter a mullet arg. *Crest*.—On a chapeau gu. turned up, erm., a lion, statant, guardant, or, crowned with a ducal coronet, per pale, arg. and of the first, gorged with a collar, of the last, thereon three roses, also arg., barbed and seeded, also ppr. *Supporters*.—Dexter, an antelope, arg., armed and unguled, or ; sinister, a greyhound, arg., each gorged with a collar, as the crest.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LOUISE DE KÉROUALLE, DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH

The Treaty of Dover.—Louise de Kéroualle in the suite of the Duchess of Orleans.—Charles attracted by her.—Louise returns to France.—Death of the Duchess of Orleans.—Louise induced to come to London.—She becomes the King's mistress.—The Duchess of Cleveland goes abroad.—Her children.—Gives birth to a son.—Created Duchess of Portsmouth.—Sworn a Lady of the Queen's Bedchamber.—She desires a *tabouret*.—Granted the ducal fief of Aubigny.—"Mrs. Carwell."—Louise and Nell Gwyn.—Nell Gwyn ridicules her.—The unpopularity of the Duchess.—The public's affection for Nell Gwyn.—Nell and the Protestant Interest.—Nell Gwyn not interested in affairs of state.—Laurence Hyde.—The Duke of Monmouth.—The Duchess's rapacity.—Some lampoons.—The Grand Prior of Vendôme.

**A**T the time when Nell Gwyn was having her first child, Charles II. fell in love with yet another charmer. In the month of May, 1670, the King, with a numerous following, went to Dover to meet his sister, the Duchess of Orleans, who brought in her train Colbert de Croissy, with whom was drawn up the famous—or rather infamous—Treaty of Dover, which was signed secretly on June 1.

In the suite of the Duchess was Louise Renée de Kéroualle, a girl then twenty or twenty-one years of age and of unusually prepossessing appearance. She was the elder of the two daughters of Guillaume de Penancœt, Sieur de Kéroualle, of a Breton family of great antiquity, while on her mother's side she was connected with the famous house of De Rieux.

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## Nell Gwyn

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Charles was now thoroughly tired of Lady Castlemaine, and he only looked upon Nell Gwyn as an occasional recreation—and, anyhow, he was always on the look-out for new and pretty faces. He wished Louise to remain in England, but the Duchess of Orleans refused to part with her Maid of Honour, knowing what the result would be, and feeling some responsibility for her. The King pleaded in vain with his sister, and Louise went back to France with the rest of the party.

The Duke of Buckingham, who had now no liking for Lady Castlemaine, kept alight the flame which Louise had lighted in Charles's facile heart. No doubt he also felt that it would strengthen his own situation if there was a royal favourite indebted to him for her position.

The Duchess of Orleans died shortly after her return to France, and Charles, who had loved her, was at once grieved at her loss and furious because he believed that she had been poisoned, though he did not state this publicly.

"The King of England is inconsolable," Colbert de Croissy wrote to Lionne on July 2, 1670, "and what still further increases his infliction and his sorrow, is that there are many people who do not refrain from asserting that Madame was poisoned, and this malicious rumour is spreading so rapidly in the town that some of the rabble have declared that violent hands ought to be laid upon the French. Nevertheless, neither his Britannic Majesty nor any member of the royal family have said anything to show that they attach any

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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credence to reports so extravagant and so far removed from the truth. I await impatiently your news respecting the details of this death and the measures which will have to be taken in order to be able to restrain the principal people of this Court from the inclination they have evinced to believe evil and to receive the sinister impressions that have been given them. God give me grace to overcome this outburst of anger, which, to tell you the truth, Monsieur, is not a little to be feared! . . . The Duke of Buckingham is in the transports of a madman, and if the King were not more wise and prudent, and my Lord Arlington very reasonable and well-intentioned, affairs here would be carried to the last extremities."

The first transports of grief over, Charles's thoughts returned to Louise de K roualle, and he sent Buckingham to Paris to enter into such negotiations with Louis XIV. as would result in the girl being sent to England. The Duke carried out the first part of his mission with success.

"The Duke of Buckingham told him that it was a decent piece of tenderness for his sister to take care of some of her servants. So she was the person the King easily consented to invite over," Burnet wrote. "That Duke assured the King of France that he could not reckon himself sure of the King but by giving him a mistress that should be true to his interests. It was soon agreed to. So the Duke of Buckingham sent her with a part of his equipage to Dieppe, and said he would presently follow."

No doubt Louise was duly grateful. But what

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## Nell Gwyn

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followed—it is almost incredible, but it is true: “The Duke, who was the most inconstant and forgetful of all men, never thought of her more, but went to England by the way of Calais.” So Montague, who was ambassador at Paris, hearing of her plight, made arrangements for her to be conveyed to London. And Buckingham instead of being high in favour with the lady was, not unnaturally, cordially hated by her.

No one was, of course, in any doubt as to the reason for Louise coming to England, and it was a tit-bit of gossip at the French Court. “The Duke of Buckingham has taken with him Mdlle. de Kéroualle, who was attached to her late Highness,” the Marquis de Saint-Maurice, Savoy’s Ambassador in Paris, wrote to Duke Charles Emmanuel II. on September 19. “She is a beautiful girl, and it is thought that the plan is to make her mistress to the King of England. The Duke of Buckingham would like to dethrone Lady Castlemaine, who is his enemy, and His Most Christian Majesty will not be sorry to see the position filled by one of his subjects, for it is said the ladies have great influence over the mind of the King of England.”

It is said that at first Louise was coy, or it may be that she did not want to live in a foreign country, and that it was only at the direct request of Louis XIV. that she went to England. On her arrival in London she was, of course, given a magnificent suite of apartments in Whitehall.

Whether the early love adventures attributed to

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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her are true cannot be said, but she was generally credited with being the mistress of that notorious gallant, Count de Sault, who was son of the Duke de Lesdiguières. Her contemporaries spoke of her in no flattering terms, and Saint-Simon wrote :

“ Her parents intended her to be Louis XIV.’s mistress, and she obtained the place of Maid of Honour to Henrietta of England (the Duchess of Orleans). Unfortunately for her, Mlle. de la Vallière was also Maid of Honour to the Princess, and the King preferred that lady. If the latter had little intelligence, she was gentle, good-natured and obliging, and made herself popular at the Court. It may be said, therefore, without attaching any importance to the libellous pamphlets, that, whether owing to indiscretions or ambitious words, Mademoiselle de Kéroualle had succeeded in giving the impression that she would not have objected to the position of King’s Favourite.”

Lady Castlemaine, who was proud of her influence over the King, was at any time quite prepared to exert it in any direction—at a price—and this she intimated to Colbert de Croissy, who passed on the information to Paris.

“ The King ” [Louis XIV.], replied Secretary Lionne in 1667, “ thinks well of your efforts to obtain the help of the Countess of Castlemaine, and read with interest of her point-blank way of telling you how King Charles had confided to her that Lord Arlington would not hear of an alliance with France. His Majesty hopes that you will profit by this good beginning, and he authorizes you, if you judge well, to let her know

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## Nell Gwyn

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that you have reported what she said to His Majesty, who charges you to offer her his warmest thanks.

"In this order of ideas," Lionne continued, "the King has directed your brother, the Treasurer, to send her a handsome present, which you can give as if from yourself. Ladies are fond of such keepsakes, whatever may be their breeding or disposition; and a nice little present can, in any case, do no harm."

It will be seen that the French Court and the French Ministers were well versed in diplomatic intrigue, and had all the knowledge of the devious paths of secret service at their disposal. They saw all the advantages of first-hand knowledge, and the utility of having someone who could put ideas into the King's head, such as that the Presbyterians and Nonconformists were ill-affected towards Monarchy. At the same time they were very careful in their choice of agents, and soon came to the conclusion that Lady Castlemaine would not be satisfactory. She was, they soon found out, too indiscreet and too quarrelsome.

Louise de K  roualle, however, in spite of her "childish, simple, and baby face," was a very shrewd young person. She was quite prepared, and possibly even eager, to serve her King and her country; but as she saw it, her first duty was to herself—and she had no intention of neglecting that. Indeed, she devoted all her powers to consolidate her position, and being herself calm in her feelings towards Charles, she held him sufficiently at bay, but only just sufficiently, to fan the flame of his passion. The King, who was no fool in these matters, may well have seen

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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through her game, but he desired her so much that he pursued her diligently.

The correspondence at this time about Louise de Kéroualle between the French Ambassador in London and the French Ministers abroad makes amusing reading. They were all worried about the resistance of the lady to her lover, and fearful lest she should overdo it, and, striving for absolute dominion, secure nothing at all. They really, as the event proved, should have had more faith in her. Every move in the game was carefully watched, and every incident was reported with the frankness that was a feature of the seventeenth century. "It appears," Colbert de Croissy, then in London, wrote, "that the affection of the King of England for Mademoiselle increases every day, and the little attack of nausea which she had yesterday when dining with me makes me hope that her good fortune will continue, at least all the remainder of my embassy." The surmise based upon this was, however, without foundation.

The King was persistent, and the surrender of the lady was treated with all the importance of an affair of state. Thus, Colbert de Croissy wrote from London to Louvois :

"It is certain that the King of England shows a warm affection for Mademoiselle de Kéroualle, and perhaps you may have heard from other sources that a richly-furnished lodging has been given her at Whitehall.

"His Majesty repairs to her apartment at nine every morning, and never stays there less than an hour,

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## Nell Gwyn

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and sometimes two. He remains much longer after dinner, shares at her card-table in all her stakes and never allows her to want for anything.

“All the Ministers court eagerly the friendship of this lady, and My Lord Arlington said to me quite recently that he was very pleased to see that the King was becoming attached to her ; and that, though His Majesty was not the man to communicate affairs of state to ladies, nevertheless, as it was in their power on occasion to render ill services to those whom they disliked and defeat their plans, it was much better for the King’s good servants that His Majesty should have an inclination for this lady, who is not of a mischievous disposition, and is a gentlewoman, rather than for actresses and such-like unworthy creatures, of whom no man of quality could take the measure ; that when he went to visit the young lady every one was able to see him enter and leave and to pay court to him ; and that it was necessary to counsel this young lady to cultivate the King’s good graces, so that he might find with her nothing but pleasure, peace and quiet.

“He added that, if Lady Arlington took his advice, she would urge this young lady to yield unreservedly to the King’s wishes, and tell her that there was no alternative for her but a convent in France, and that I ought to be the first to impress this on her.

“I told him jocularly that I was not so wanting in gratitude to the King or so foolish as to tell her to prefer religion to his good graces ; that I was also persuaded that she was not waiting for my advice,

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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but that I would, none the less, give it her, to show how much both he and I appreciated her influence, and to inform her of the obligation she was under to My Lord.

“ I believe that I can assure you that if she had made sufficient progress in the King’s affection to be of use in some way to His Majesty, she will do her duty.”

The cynicism of the statesmen was amazing : in these days, when there is less of frankness, it is almost incredible that such men as Arlington and Colbert de Croissy should talk in this fashion. The intrigues over Louise de K roualle were incredibly mean, and would have been even more disgusting if it were not certain that the lady intended, in her own good time, to yield herself to the King’s pleasure.

All those who concerned themselves in this matter decided that the affair had lingered long enough and must now be brought to a head. The Arlingtons and the French Ambassador forgathered and made plans for the overcoming of the girl’s honour. After some discussion, it was decided that Louise should be invited to the Arlingtons’ seat, Euston Hall, near Thetford, in October, where a large house-party would be assembled, and that the King should come over from Newmarket, where he and the Duke of York were staying. Everything went according to plan, and the King at last had his way with her.

“ It was universally reported,” writes Evelyn, who was one of the guests at Euston Hall, “ that the fair lady was bedded one of these nights, and the stocking

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## Nell Gwyn

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flung after the manner of a married bride. I acknowledge that she was for the most part in her undress all day, and that there was fondness and toying with the young wanton. Nay, it was said that I was at the former ceremony, but it is utterly false. I neither saw nor heard of any such thing whilst I was there, though I had been in her chamber and all over that apartment late enough, and was observing all passages with much curiosity. However, it was with confidence believed that she was first made a *Miss*, as they call these unhappy creatures, with solemnity at the time."

That everything went off according to plan may be gathered from a letter of Colbert de Croissy to Louvois, dated October 22, 1671. "The King comes frequently [to Euston] to take his repasts with us, and afterwards spends some hours with Mlle. de K  roualle. He has already paid her three visits. He invited us yesterday to the races at Newmarket, where we were entertained very splendidly, and he showed towards her all the kindness, all the little attentions and all the assiduities that a great passion can inspire. And since she has not been wanting, on her side, in all the gratitude that the love of a great King can deserve from a beautiful girl, it is believed that the attachment will be of long duration and that it will exclude all the others."

No wonder that Madame de S  vign   wrote to her daughter (March 30, 1672) :

"Don't you like to hear that little K  roualle, whose star was divined before she left, had followed it faithfully. The King of England, on seeing her, straight-

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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way fell in love, and she did not frown at him when he declared his passion. The upshot is, that she is in an interesting state. Is it not all astonishing ? Castle-maine is in disgrace. England truly is a droll country."

From this time the King went less and less to the Duchess of Cleveland. Probably the relations of lover and mistress had ceased before this. He was, however, fond of his children by her, and visited them, or had them come to see him frequently. As regards their mother, however, he was no doubt tired of her tantrums and weary of her rapacity. It is said he gave her a hint of his waning affection by getting Will Legge to sing to her the following ballad :

" When Aurelia first I courted,  
    She had youth and beauty too ;  
Killing pleasures when she sported,  
    And her charms were ever new.  
Conqu'ring Time does now deceive her ;  
    Which her glories did uphold :  
All her arts can ne'er retrieve her,  
    Poor Aurelia's growing old.

" The airy spirits which invited,  
    Are retir'd, and move no more ;  
And her eyes are now benighted,  
    Which were comets heretofore ;  
Want of these abates her merits,  
    Yet I've passion for her name :  
Only kind and active spirits  
    Kindle, and maintain the flame."

After 1673, owing to the operation of the Test Act, the Duchess of Cleveland's name does not again appear in the list of the Ladies of the Bedchamber to

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## Nell Gwyn

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the Queen, but for the loss of this dignity the King consoled her with presents. She remained in England until 1677, when she paid a long visit to Paris, but her influence for some years before that had become almost a negligible quantity.

The King, of course, provided handsomely in every way for his children (or those he accepted as his children) by the Duchess of Cleveland.

The elder daughter, Anne, and the second girl, Charlotte, were given before they married the precedence of dukes' daughters.

Lady Anne Fitzroy, who was born in 1661, was married at Hampton Court on August 11, 1674, to Thomas Lennard, fifteenth Lord Dacre, who in that year was created Earl of Sussex by the King. He received with his bride a dowry of £20,000. From 1680 to 1685 he was a Gentleman of the Bedchamber. It is recorded that he lost a large fortune at cards and squandered much money in extravagant living, and had to sell his estate of Hurstmonceux, and died in 1715 a poor man. He had no heirs male, and the earldom expired with him. The younger of his daughters (the elder having predeceased her father) succeeded to the barony.

Lady Charlotte Fitzroy, who was born in 1664, was, at the age of ten, betrothed to Sir Edward Henry Lee, first baronet, of Ditchley Park, near Spelsbury, Oxfordshire, who was then created Earl of Litchfield. The marriage took place three years later. Charlotte received a dowry of £18,000.

In addition to providing his daughters with dowries,

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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he settled £2,000 a year on their husbands. It also fell to him, as recorded in the "Secret Service Accounts of Charles II. and James II.," to pay the cost of the trousseaux and other expenses of the weddings.

The eldest son, who was born in 1662, was known as Charles Palmer, Lord Limerick, that being the second title of his alleged father, the Earl of Castlemaine. In 1670, when his mother was created Duchess of Cleveland and Countess of Southampton, the patent conferred upon him the right to use the title of Earl of Southampton, by which style he was referred to until his mother's death, when he succeeded to the dukedom. He survived until 1730. His son William came into the title, but, dying without issue, the dukedom became extinct.

The second son, Henry, who was born in 1663—the King did not at first accept the paternity—was married in 1672 to Isabella, daughter and heir of Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington, then five years old, in the presence of the King and the Court. In that year he was created Earl of Euston, and in 1675 Duke of Grafton. He served at sea and in the army, and was mortally wounded in 1690, when serving as a volunteer under Marlborough, in the south of Ireland.

The youngest son, George, who was born in 1665, was created Earl of Northumberland in 1674, and was advanced Duke of Northumberland nine years later. He married, in 1686, Catherine, daughter of Robert Wheatley, a poulterer, of Bracknell, Berkshire, and widow of Robert Lucy, of Charlcote. He served in the army, and rose to the rank of lieutenant-general.

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## Nell Gwyn

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He became Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire in 1709 and Lord Lieutenant of Surrey in 1714. He was also Chief Butler of England. On the accession of George I. he was deprived of his offices. He died, without issue, in 1716.

Louise de K roualle gave birth to a son on July 29, 1672, and thereby strengthened her hold on the affection of the King, who loved such proofs of his virility. In August, 1675, the boy, who was called Charles Lennox, was created Baron of Settrington, Yorkshire, Earl of March and Duke of Richmond, Yorkshire, in the peerage of England, and, as if this were not enough, in the next month, Baron Methuen of Tarbolton, Earl of Darnley and Duke of Lennox, in the peerage of Scotland. Louis XIV. also gave him the dignity of Duke of Aubigny, in remainder to his mother, but as he predeceased her, the title went direct to his only son. Honours were showered upon him. At the age of nine he was made a Knight of the Garter and also Governor of Dumbarton Castle, and a year later he was appointed Master of the Horse, vacant by reason of the removal of the Duke of Marlborough, the office during his minority being put in commission.

In 1673 Louise requested (through the medium of the French Ambassador in London) the permission of Louis XIV. to be naturalized in England, "as a necessary means to profit by the gifts which the King of England might have the kindness to bestow upon her." Louis consented, and on August 19, 1673, she was created Baroness Petersfield, Countess of Fareham

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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and Duchess of Portsmouth. It is said that the title first chosen for the dukedom was that of Pendennis ; it is not known why it was changed. Shortly after she was raised to the peerage she was sworn a Lady of the Queen's Bedchamber. The long-suffering Catherine bore this infliction with such dignity as she might. There is this to the credit of Louise that, in contradistinction to the Duchess of Cleveland, she always behaved with respect to Her Majesty.

Louise was ambitious. She did her best for her country, but herself was always in the foreground of her thoughts. In December, 1673, when Queen Catherine was ill, she became excited at what the future might possibly have in store for her.

"The King," wrote Colbert de Croissy at this time, "is going to sup and dance at Lord Arlington's, and I am to be of the party. So also is the Duchess of Richmond. Her great talent is dancing. Made-moiselle de K roualle may be taken in by all these parties, and all the more so because she does not keep her head sober, since she has got into it that it is possible she may be Queen of England. She talks from morning till night of the Queen's ailments as if they were mortal."

Catherine of Braganza, however, survived until 1705, and so another injustice to Britain at the hands of a Stuart King was averted—if, indeed, Charles ever intended to marry Louise, which may be doubted.

An English duchy was good in the eyes of Louise de K roualle, but what she desired still more was a stool, or *tabouret*, of duchess in the Presence Chamber

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## Nell Gwyn

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at the Court of Versailles. This was a privilege most jealously guarded, but Louise had set her heart on securing it, and persuaded Charles to use all his influence on her behalf. In July, 1673, the King took the first step by expressing to Colbert de Croissy his desire that Louise should be granted the ducal fief of Aubigny, not only for her life, but with remainder to her son. The estate in question, which had been granted in the early fifteenth century to John Stuart, had just reverted to the French Crown on the death of the Duke of Richmond, the last heir male of his line. A battle-royal ensued. Louise was becoming insistent and Charles ill-tempered.

"I own I find her on all occasions so ill-disposed for the service of the [French] King and showing such ill-humour against France (whether because she feels herself despised there, or whether from an effect of caprice), that I really think she deserves no favour of His Majesty," Colbert wrote on July 17 to the new French Foreign Minister, Arnauld de Pomponne. "But as the King of England shows her much love and so visibly likes to please her, His Majesty can judge whether it is best not to treat her according to her merits. An attention paid to her will be taken by the King of England as one paid to himself. I have, however, told him upon what conditions alone the fief could be granted, and what he asks is just the contrary."

In the following year Louise was granted the estate, with remainder to such of her natural children by Charles as he should designate, but the title of

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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Duchess of Aubigny, carrying with it the right of a *tabouret*, was for the present withheld.

The Duchess of Portsmouth, who in this country was commonly alluded to as Mrs. Carwell (a corruption of her family name), was very unpopular, and was the butt of all the lampoonists. Andrew Marvell, in his "Dialogue between Two Horses," attacked her and the King :

### *Woodchurch*

That the King should send for another French whore ;  
When one already has made him so poor.

### *Chorus*

The misses take place, each advanced to be duchess  
With pomp great as queens in their coach and six horses ;  
Their bastards made dukes, earls, viscounts and lords,  
And all the title that honour affords.

### *Woodchurch*

While those brats and their mothers do live in such plenty,  
The nation's impoverished and the 'Chequers quite empty,  
And though war was pretended when the money was lent,  
More on whores, than in ships or in war hath been spent.

### *Chorus*

Enough, my dear brother, although we speak reason  
Yet truth many times being punished for treason.

The Duchess of Portsmouth, in spite of her position, did not have it all her own way, either with the King or in Court circles. She could treat with disdain the fury of the discarded Duchess of Cleveland ; but Nell Gwyn, who took the field against her with the utmost energy, although she could not undermine the Duchess's influence, did at least contrive to give her many a bad quarter of an hour. Madame de

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## Nell Gwyn

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Sévigné, writing in September, 1675, summed up the situation, which was then causing much amusement in society :

“ With regards to England, Mademoiselle de Kéroualle has been disappointed in nothing ; she wished to be the mistress of the King, and she is so. He takes up his abode with her almost every night in the face of the whole Court : she has had a son, who has been acknowledged, and presented with two duchies. She amasses treasure, and makes herself feared and respected as much as she can.

“ But she did not foresee that she should find a young actress in her way, whom the King doats on ; and she has it not in her power to withdraw him from her. He divides his care, his time, and his health between these two.

“ The actress is as haughty as the Duchess of Portsmouth ; she insults her, makes faces at her, attacks her, frequently steals the King from her, and boasts of his preference to her. She is young, indiscreet, confident, meretricious, and pleasant ; she sings, dances, and acts her part well. She has a son by the King, and wishes to have him acknowledged : she reasons thus : ‘ This Duchess,’ says she, ‘ pretends to be a person of quality ; she says she is related to the best families in France ; whenever any person of distinction dies, she puts herself in mourning. If she be a lady of such quality, why does she demean herself to be a courtesan ? She ought to be ashamed of herself.

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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“ ‘ As for me, it is my profession ; I do not pretend to be anything better. The King maintains me, and I am constant to him at present. He has a son by me : I say he ought to acknowledge him, and I am sure he will, for he loves me as well as he does Portsmouth.’ ”

“ This creature gets the upper hand, and discourtenances and embarrasses the Duchess extremely. I like these original characters—I could find nothing better to send you from Orléans ; but this is at least truth.”

Nell Gwyn's humour, though unrefined, was trenchant, and in these days the shafts of her wit were invariably directed against the latest favourite. The Duchess of Portsmouth, as Madame de Sévigné indicated, was very proud of her descent, and this gave Nell Gwyn more than one opportunity to ridicule her.

When the King of Sweden died, Louise went into mourning. Shortly after the King of Portugal died, and Nell drove about in a mourning coach. Then, attired in solemn black, she said to her rival before a large company : “ Let us agree to divide the world : you shall have the Kings of the north, and I the Kings of the south.”

This sort of joke was an unfailing joy to Nell Gwyn, and a delight to the Court. She was never tired of playing it—though it was not quite fair, because the de Kéroualles were really a family of great lineage. However, a trifle like that did not deter Nell, and it

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## Nell Gwyn

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served her well at intervals throughout the life of King Charles. Even so late as 1682, she played the same prank, as is recorded in a letter from George Legge to Lord Preston :

“Nell was often successful in throwing ridicule on her rival, the Duchess of Portsmouth, who pretended to be related to the best families of France, and when one of their number died [the Prince de Rohan], she put herself in mourning.

“It happened that news of the Cham of Tartary’s death had lately reached England. A Prince of France was also recently dead, and the Duchess of Portsmouth was, of course, in sables. Nell came to Court in the same attire, and, standing close by her Grace, was asked by one of her friends why she was in mourning.

“‘Oh,’ said Nell, ‘have you not heard of my loss in the death of the Cham of Tartary?’

“‘And what the deuce was the Cham of Tartary to you?’

“‘Oh, exactly the same relation that the French Prince was to Mademoiselle de K roualle.’”

Cunningham recalls the fact that there is a rare print of the Duchess of Portsmouth reclining on a mossy bank, with very little covering other than a lace chemise, and that there is also a print of Nell Gwyn in nearly the same posture and equally unclad. The story runs, he says, that Nell had contrived to

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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fetch the chemise from the Duchess, and by wearing it herself at a time when the Duchess should have worn it, to have attracted the King, and tricked her rival. Certainly such a trick was well within the limits of Nell's repertoire.

There is recorded in a little book called "Jokes upon Jokes" a retort of Nell Gwyn upon the Duchess :

"The Duchess of Portsmouth one time supped with the King's Majesty ;

Two chickens were at table, when the Duchess would make 'em three.

Nell Gwyn, being by, denied the same ; the Duchess speedily Reply'd here's one, another two, and two and one makes three.

"Tis well said, lady, answered Nell : O King, here's one for thee, Another for myself, sweet Charles, 'cause you and I agree ; The third she may take to herself, because she found the same : The King himself laughed heartily, whilst Portsmouth blush'd for shame."

There is another amusing incident recalled by Mr. Noel Williams in his biography of the Duchess of Portsmouth. Nell Gwyn paid a visit to the Duchess Mazarin to thank her for her congratulations on the elevation of her son to the peerage (December, 1676). The Duchess of Portsmouth was also there, who hated her hostess, and Lady Harvey, who was on bad terms with the Duchess of Portsmouth and most intimate with the Duchess Mazarin. "Everything passed off quite gaily, and with many civilities one to the other ; but I do not suppose that in all England it would be

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## Nell Gwyn

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possible to get together three women more obnoxious to one another," Honoré Courtin wrote to Arnauld de Pomponne. When the Duchess of Portsmouth had taken her departure, the irrepressible Nell, "who was in a very sprightly humour," began to banter the French Ambassador, and asked him before every one to persuade Louis XIV. to make her a handsome present, "telling me," wrote Courtin, "that she well deserved it and that she was of much more service to the King of England than was Madame de Portsmouth, and making me understand and all the company that he passed the night more often with her." After which, at the request of the other ladies, who had heard much of the fineness of the actress's underclothing and wanted to see for themselves if report had spoken truly, the young lady "lifted up all her petticoats, one after the other; and never have I seen anything so neat or more magnificent."

The Duchess of Portsmouth, who was always very much on her dignity except with the King and her other lovers, and had no liking for Nell, did once score off the latter. "I remember," Defoe has related, "that the late Duchess of Portsmouth in the time of Charles II. gave a severe retort to one who was praising Nell Gwyn, whom she hated. They were talking of her wit and beauty, and how she always diverted the King with her extraordinary repartees, how she had a fine mien, and appeared as much the lady of quality as anybody. 'Yes, madam,' said the Duchess, 'but anybody may know she has been an orange-wench by her swearing.'"



'Lifted up all her petticoats, one after the other, and never  
have I seen anything so neat or more magnificent "



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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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Of course, the Duchess of Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn were not always bickering. Circumstances brought them much together, and Nell's sense of humour at the situation must often have overcome her irritation. They often met at Court after 1675, when the actress was appointed a Lady of the Queen's Bedchamber, and more often in the private apartments. It is recorded by Anthony Wood, of the King's private parties, that "they met either in the lodgings of Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth, or in those of Chaffinch near the back stairs, or in the apartments of Nell Gwyn, or those of Baptist May. They, on occasion, both accompanied the King to Oxford and went with him to Newmarket. Nell Gwyn was, too, from time to time the guest of the Duchess, and Evelyn records one such instance :

"This evening I was at the entertainment of the Morocco Ambassador at the Duchess of Portsmouth's glorious apartments at Whitehall, where there was a great banquet of sweetmeats and music, but at which both the Ambassador and his retinue behaved themselves with extraordinary moderation and modesty, though placed about a long table, a lady between two Moors, and among these were the King's natural children, Lady Lichfield and Sussex, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Nelly, etc., concubines, and cattle of that sort, as splendid as jewells and excess of bravery could make them."

All England took a hand in the game between these two mistresses of the King's; so far as popularity

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## Nell Gwyn

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went, Nell Gwyn won easily. An anonymous writer of the eighteenth century related, as an instance of it, the following story :

“ She was the most popular of the King’s mistresses : an eminent goldsmith, who died about fifteen years ago, in the seventy-ninth year of his age, assured me that when he was a prentice, his master made a most expensive service of plate (the King’s present) for the Duchess of Portsmouth. He remembered well that an infinite number of people crowded to the shop out of mere curiosity ; that they threw a thousand ill-wishes against the Duchess, and wished the silver was melted, and poured down her throat ; but ’twas ten thousand pities his Majesty had not bestowed this bounty on Madam Ellen.”

That Nell Gwyn did not hesitate to tell the King of the unpopularity of the Duchess of Portsmouth one can feel sure. The author of her biography, published in 1752, gives a story bearing on this point, and though the story itself may be, and probably is, an invention as it stands, it certainly had a basis in fact :

“ Of all King Charles’s mistresses, Nell was undoubtedly the least offensive to the contending parties, she never engaged in any disputes ; she raised no enemies by her ambition, and lost no friends by her insolence ; so far was she from drawing aside the King from an attention to his affairs that she often excited

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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him to diligence ; and in the hours of dalliance would drop a hint, that if ever he fell into distress, he might thank his ladies for it.

“ One day when he had been struggling in the Council, and torn to pieces by the multiplicity of petitions presented to him for redress, the outrageous behaviour of the ministers, and the fierce contentions of the Parliament, he retired into Nell's apartment very pensive, and seemed entirely under the influence of grief. She took the liberty to ask his Majesty the cause of his disorder :

“ ‘ O Nell ! ’ says he. ‘ What shall I do to please the People of England ? I am torn to pieces by their clamours.’

“ ‘ If it please your Majesty,’ says she, ‘ there is but one way left, which expedient I am afraid it will be difficult to persuade you to embrace.’

“ ‘ What is that ? ’ says his Majesty in a tone that denoted curiosity.

“ ‘ Dismiss your ladies, may it please your Majesty, and mind your business ; the People of England will soon be pleased.’ ”

One reason for the hatred—and it was nothing less than hatred—with which the Duchess of Portsmouth inspired the people was that she was a Roman Catholic at a time when members of that Church were tremendously unpopular.

Nell Gwyn's devotion to the Church of England tickled the fancy of Rochester, who alluded to it in his “ Panegyrick on Nelly : ”

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## Nell Gwyn

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" True to th' Protestant Interest and Cause,  
True to th' Establish'd Government and Laws ;  
The choice delight of the whole *Mobile*,  
Scarce *Monmouth's* self is more belov'd than she.

" Was this the cause that did their quarrel move,  
That both are rivals in the People's Love ?  
No, 'twas her matchless Loyalty alone  
That bade Prince *Perkin* pack up and begone.

" ' Ill bred thou art,' says Prince. *Nell* does reply,  
' Was Mrs. Barlow better bred than I ? '  
Thus sneak'd away the Nephew, overcome  
By his Aunt-in-law's severer wit struck dumb."

Another reason for the general dislike of the King's French mistress was that it was generally believed, and rightly believed, that she was always working in the interests of her own country, and this in spite of the fact that she had been naturalized here.

Nell Gwyn, on the other hand, it was recognized had no desire to take a hand, and, indeed, had little or no interest, in foreign or even domestic affairs. Indeed, it would mightily have amused the King had she at any time aired her views on the political situation. To get a " job " done for a friend now and then was the limit of her ambition. She was apparently quite content with her royal lover, her son, and the jolly harum-scarum life she led.

Yet, of course, she being high in favour with the King, many efforts were made to secure her influence, and, if necessary, her interference in affairs of state.

There were, however, some few who actually believed that she was an active politician.



" Pray, good people, be civil. I am the Protestant whore "



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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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Among these was the Earl of Danby, who, on September 22, 1677, wrote to his wife :

“ Remember to send to see my Lord Burford without any message to Nelly, and when Mrs. Turner is with you, bid her tell Nelly you wonder she should be your Lord’s enemy that has always been kind to her, but you wonder more to find her supporting only those who are known to be the King’s enemies, for in that you are sure she does very ill.”

Again, there is in the Ninth Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission a note of a letter of Ralph Montagu, afterwards Duke of Montagu, which contains this passage: “ I know for certain there is a great caball to bring in Mr. Hyde, and that Nellie and the Duke of Buckingham are in it.”

That there certainly was an effort made to bring Nell Gwyn into the plot is shown in the following letter, dated June 4, 1678, from Henry Savile to Lord Rochester :

“ My Lady Hervey who allways loves one civill plott more, is working body and soule to bring Mrs. Jenny Middleton into play. How dangerous a new one is to all old ones I need not tell you, but her Ladyship, having little opportunity of seeing Charlemagne upon her owne account, wheadles poor Mrs. Nelly into supper twice or thrice a week at W. C.[haffinch]’s and carryeing her with her ; soe that in good earnest this poor creature is betrayed by her Ladyship to pimp against herselfe ; for there her Ladyship whispers

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## Nell Gwyn

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and contrives all matters to her owne ends, as the other might easily perceive if she were not too giddy to mistrust a false friend."

Laurence Hyde, who was the second son of the Earl of Clarendon, was in August, 1678, sent on a mission to the Netherlands, and it was while he was there that Nell Gwyn sent him one of her rare letters :

" Pray, Deare Mr. Hide, forgive me for not writeing to you before now, for the reasone is I have bin sick thre months and sinse I recoverd I have had nothing to intertaine you withall, nor have nothing now worth writing, but that I can holde no longer to let you know I never have ben in any companie wethout drinking your health, for I love you with all my soule.

" The pel mel is now to me a dismale place since I have utterly lost Sr. Car Scrope,\* never to be recoverd agane, for he tould me he could not live alwayes at this rate, and so begune to be a littel uncivil, which I could not suffer from an uglye *baux garcon*.

" Mrs. Knight's† lady mother dead, and she has put up a scutchin no beiger then my Lady Grin's‡ scunchis.

\* Sir Carr Scrope (1649-1680), a man about town and a minor poet. He was a boon companion of Charles II., who in 1667 created him baronet.

† Mrs. Knight, the singer, who was for a while mistress of Charles II.

‡ Lady Green was Katherine, daughter of Thomas Pegge, of Yeldersley, co. Durham, and wife of Sir Edward Green, Bart., of Sampford in Essex, who died in 1676. She was one of the King's mistresses, and bore him two children, a daughter Katherine, and a son Charles Fitz-Charles, who was created Earl of Plymouth in 1675 and died in 1680. Lady Green was evidently dead shortly before this letter was written.

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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" My Lord Rochester\* is gone in the cuntrei.

" Mr. Savil† has got a misfortune, but is upon recovery and is to marry an hairess, who I think wont wont [*sic*] have an ill time out if he hold up his thumb.

" My Lord of Dorscit‡ apiers worze in thre months, for he drinkes aile with Shadwell and Mr. Haris at the Duke's home all day long.

" My Lord Bauclaire§ is is [*sic*] goeing into France.

" We are agoeing to supe with the king at Whithall and my lady Harvie.||

" The King remembers his sarvis to you.

" Now let's talke of state affairs, for we never caried things so cunningly as now, for we don't know whether we shall have peace or war, but I am for war, and for no other reason but that you may come home.

" I have a thoussand merry conseets, bpt I can't make her write me, and therefore you must take the will for the deed. God bye.

" Your most loveing obedient, faithfull and humbel servant,

" E. G."

It is really impossible for anyone to read into the letter to Hyde anything of political import. It would

\* John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, already mentioned in this book. He died in 1680. Two years later this title was bestowed on Laurence Hyde.

† Henry Savile (1642-1687), courtier and diplomatist, Groom of the Chamber to Charles II., M.P. for Newark. He died unmarried.

‡ The Earl of Dorset is the Lord Buckhurst of Nell's Epsom escapade.

§ " My Lord Bauclaire " is Lord James Beauclaire, the younger son of Nell Gwyn. He died at Paris in September, 1680, in his ninth year.

|| Elizabeth, wife of Sir Daniel Harvey.

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## Nell Gwyn

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require a very tortuous brain to believe that Nell Gwyn said that she was "for war" for any other reason than that she wished to pay a compliment to her correspondent. That she had her favourites, like everyone else in the world, goes without saying ; but that she had any leaning to this political party or that, or to this statesman or that *qua* statesman, is not borne out by any evidence whatsoever that has come to light.

Among her friends were Henry Sidney (afterwards Earl of Romney) and Lord Cavendish (afterwards Duke of Devonshire), and these paid court to Nell Gwyn for their own ends. Charles, who saw through their designs, forbade her to receive them. Their object was to advance the interests of the Protestant Duke of Monmouth as against those of the Roman Catholic Duke of York. Charles, who could be firm enough when his peace of mind was at stake, would have none of this intriguing round the succession, though he was well enough aware of the unpopularity of his brother. It is evident from the favour with which Nell Gwyn was treated by James II. after he came to the throne that he was satisfied that if she had been of no service to him, at least she had never secretly conspired against him.

Nell Gwyn would seem to have had a soft spot in her heart for Monmouth, even though she thought his efforts futile, and her good-nature induced her to make an effort to keep him on good terms with his father.

In 1679, it is recorded in the "Memoirs of the Verney

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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Family," she did the Duke of Monmouth all the kindness she could, but that her influence was nothing ; and, again, " Nell Gwyn begged hard of His Majesty to see the Duke, telling him he was grown pale, wan, lean and long-visaged merely because he was in disfavour, but the King bid her be quiet because he would not see him." Barillon wrote to Louis XIV. in December, 1679, announcing the return of Monmouth, " who every night sups with Nelly, the courtesan who has borne the King two children, and whom he daily visits." There is yet one more reference to Nell Gwyn's interest in Monmouth in a letter written in the following July by Lady Sunderland to Lord Halifax : " There is one place of council I should never have suspected (my Lady Orrery's) till I did know that my Lord Shaftesbury, the Duke of Monmouth and my Lord Cavendish do meet and sup there, and Mrs. Nelly, who the King hath forbid letting the Duke of Monmouth come to her house."

Not even the Duchess of Cleveland was so grasping as the Duchess of Portsmouth. M. Ferneron, the biographer of the latter lady, and Mr. Oscar Airy, the historian of the reign of Charles II., have been at pains to collect some figures that give some idea of what she cost this country. Her regular pension at the beginning of the connection with the King was £12,000 a year, but gradually she contrived to accumulate other allowances that brought up her income to £40,000 a year. Danby was continually being pestered by her for money. In March, 1674, she gave her support to him on condition that he found funds

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## Nell Gwyn

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for a " Necklesse of Pearle, £8,000 price, of a merchant, and a payre of diamond pendants, 3,000 guynyes, of elder Lady Northumberland, neither of whom will part with them without ready money." In September, 1676, an advance on the Customs was secured by Charles, "for Lady Portsmouth hath a new £30,000 debt must be paid at once." Apart from this, in the last six months of 1676 she received £8,773 as against Nell Gwyn's £2,862 ; in 1677, £27,300 as against Nell's £5,250. In 1681—a record year for her—she drew, on one account and another, the enormous sum of £136,668 from the Treasury.

"I have a thing to tell you, Monsieur, for the [French] King's information, which should remain secret as long as it pleases his Majesty to keep it so, because if it gets out it might be a source of unseemly raillery," Count de Ruigny wrote to de Pomponne on May 14, 1674. "Whilst the King was winning provinces, the King of England was catching a malady which he has been at the trouble of communicating to the Duchess of Portsmouth. That Prince is nearly cured ; but to all appearance the lady will not so soon be rid of the virus. She had been, however, in a degree consoled for such a troublesome present by one more suitable to her charms—a pearl necklace worth four thousand jacobus, and a diamond worth six thousand, which have so rejoiced her that I should not wonder if, for the price, she were not willing to risk another attack."

The Duchess was sent by the doctors to Tunbridge, where the waters were coming into fashion. The

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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Marchioness of Worcester had, however, established herself in the house which the Duchess had proposed to occupy, and would not give way. The Duchess said the law was on her side ; the Marchioness advised her to invoke it. The Duchess said that, because she was a Duchess, a mere Marchioness should yield ; the Marchioness retorted that titles earned by prostitution were not seriously regarded, and taunted her with her *affaires* with de Sault and Hamilton. Louise, utterly routed, appealed to Charles, who, to appease her, actually sent a detachment of the Household Cavalry to escort her to Windsor !

There his own physician attended her.

It may well be believed that the King had to pay heavily for his outrage. Part of the price was a pension of £600 a year for Louise's sister, Henriette, who came to London about this time and presently married Philip Herbert, seventh Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery—a dowry being provided for her out of the Privy Purse.

A number of lampoonists took, from time to time, the rivalry of Nell Gwyn and the Duchess as their subject.

There has been preserved an amusing pasquinade, entitled "A Pleasant Battle between Two Lap-dogs of the Utopian Court." Part of the argument is :

" The English lap-dog here does first begin  
The vindication of his lady, Gwynn :  
The other much more Frenchified, alas,  
Shows what his lady is, not what she was."

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## Nell Gwyn

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The two curs, Tutty and Snap-short—the former the property of Nell Gwyn, the other of the Duchess of Portsmouth—enter into a ludicrous and snarling discussion respecting the merits of their respective mistresses. This dispute is about to end in a fray, when the rival ladies sweep into the room, and conclude a diverting scene with the following dialogue :

“ *Duchess of Portsmouth.*—‘ Pray, Madam, give my dog fair play ; I protest you hinder him with your petticoats ; he cannot fasten. Madam, fair play is fair play.’ ”

“ *Madam Gwynn.*—‘ Truly, Madam, I thought I knew as well what belonged to dog-fighting as your Ladyship : but since you pretend to instruct me in your French dog-play, pray, Madam, stand a little farther, as you respect your own flesh, for my little dog is mettle to the back and smells a Popish Miss at a far greater distance. Pray, Madam, take warning, for you stand on dangerous ground. “ Haloo, haloo, haloo ! Be brave, Tutty. Ha, brave Snap-short. A guinea on Tutty—two to one on Tutty.” ’ ”

“ ‘ Done,’ quoth Monsieur, ‘ begar, begar, me have lost near tousand pound.’ ”

“ Tutty it seems beat Snap-short, and the bell  
Tutty bears home in Victory : farewell ! ”

There has also been preserved some amusing doggerel, entitled “ Dialogue between the Dutchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwin at Parting,” only some portion of which can be quoted :

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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*Madam Gwin.*

" You never suffer'd Nell to come in Play  
Whilst you had left but one Meridian-Ray,  
And yet by turns I did myself that right,  
If you enjoy'd the day, I rul'd the night.

" Let Fame that never yet Spoke well of Woman,  
Give out I was a Stroling Whore, and Common,  
Yet have I been to him since the first hour,  
As Constant as the Needle to the Flower ;  
Whilst you to your Eternal Praise and Fame  
To Forreign Scents betray'd the Royal Game.

" My name, thou Jezebel of Pride and Malice,  
Whose father had a hog-stey for his Pallace,  
In my clear Viens but British Bloud does flow,  
Whilst thou like a *French* Tode-stool first did grow,  
And from a Birth as poer as they delight,  
Sprang up a Mushroom-Dutchess in a Night.

*The Duchess of Portsmouth.*

" Think not i'th. Respeit of this short Remove  
To sit sole Empress on the Throne of Love.  
I was thy Rival once, and will Return  
To be thy Rival still, and thou my Scorne.

*Madam Gwin.*

" The peoples Hate much less their Curse I fear.  
I do them Justice with less Sums a Year.  
I neither run in Court nor City's Score.  
I pay my Debts, Distribute to the Poor.  
Whilst thou with ill-kept Treasure does Resort  
T' uphold thy splendor in the *Gallick* Court.  
But *France* is for thy Lust too Kind a Clime,  
In *Africk* with some Wolf or Tyger Lime ;  
Or in the Indies make a new Plantation  
And ease us of the *Grievance of the Nation.*"

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## Nell Gwyn

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### A PLEASANT DIALOGUE BETWIXT TWO WANTON LADIES OF PLEASURE.

*The Dutchess of Por[t]smouths woful Far[e]wel  
to her former Felicity.*

One Lady she Couragiously stands in her own defence ;  
The other now doth seem to bow, her Colours are display'd,  
Assuredly none can deny the Words she speaks aro sence :  
She is content her mind is bent, still maintain her Trade.

*Tune of, Tan tarra rara, tan tive.*

" Brave Gallants, now listen and I will tell you,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

A pleasant discourse that I heard at *Pell Mell*,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

Between two fair Ladys of the wanton strain,

The one to the other did sigh and complain,

I wish I was over in *France* now again,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

" Quoth *Nelly*, I prithee, who sent for thee here,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

'Tis you with a shame that put in for a share,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

O do you remember when I was dismay'd

When you in attire was richly array'd,

Alas I poor *Nelly* was wrong'd in my trade,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

" I pray now could you not your honour advance,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

With some noble Peer in the Nation of *France*,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

Forsooth you must needs leave your Country, dear,

To utter your fine French Commodity here,

But sorrow and trouble will bring up the rear,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

" Dear *Nelly*, be loving, and do not reflect

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

But prithee now show me some civil respect,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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For now I am in a most pitiful case,  
For shame will not let me uncover my face,  
My honour is turn'd to a wail of disgrace,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la*

“Quoth Nelly, pray send for the treasure again,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
That you did send over while you were in fame :  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Come, come I must tell ye that you was too bold  
To send from this nation such parcels of gold,  
In such kind dealings you must be controul'd,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

“No, sweet Madam Nelly, you cannot deny,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
But you have had the treasure as often as I,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
And yet must I onely indeed be run down  
By you that I value the least in the Town,  
If I come in favour upon thee i'll frown,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

“You drab of a Miss, I do hold you in scorn,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
I'de have you know I am this Nation born,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Your coming to *England* I heartily rue,  
Of many [a] good bout I've been cheated by you,  
For which may a Thousand vexations issue,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

“No matter for that, it was all my delight,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
But now I am in a most pittiful plight,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Unfortunate Lady that now am deny'd,  
In this vail of sorrow my patience is try'd,  
Sure this may be termed the downfall of pride,  
*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

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## Nell Gwyn

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"I'll warrant you thought it would ever be day,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

But now you are utterly fell to decay,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

You are in a sad and deplorable state,

You wander alone for want of a Mate,

You're like an old Almanack quite out of date,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

"No, Nelly, I will not be clearly dismay'd

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

I'll set a good face and will follow my trade,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

I shall have some trading I do make no doubt,

I'll have youthful damosels to ply on the scout,

I'll play a small game now before I'll stick out,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la."*

### THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH'S FAREWELL.

The Duchess holds a Dialogue, Yea, doth relate the wretched  
and talks with Madam Gwin : state, that now she liveth in.

[*Nell Gwyn begins :*]

"I Prithee, dear *Portsmouth*, now tell me thy mind,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

Dost thou not think that the Fates are unkind ?

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

It is not long since thy fame it was great

But now 'tis eclips'd by unkindness of fate,

Thy case now doth seem a sad tale to relate,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la."*

[*The Duchess of Portsmouth complains :*]

"Ah *Nell*, could I but my sorrow explain,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

Which filleth my heart with sorrow and pain,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*

A shower from mine eyes I should certainly weep,

Would add to the waves of the Ocean so deep,

For now my dear friend lyes fast in his sleep,

*With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la."*

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## Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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[*Nell Gwynn replies :*]

“Magnificent splendor did on thee attend,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
And now I would have thee thy life to amend,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
’On rich and on poor Dame Fortune doth frown,  
Thou from thy great honour art tumbled down ;  
It is not thy money thy actions can crown,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.”*

[*Duchess of Portsmouth retorts :*]

“Add not to my sorrow and now I am perplexed,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
For ought I do know, *Nell*, thou may’st be the next,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Then seem not at my distress for to scorn,  
To happiness lasting few people is born,  
And I like my self am now left forlorn,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.”*

[*Nell Gwynn rallies her :*]

“What, must thou return to thy country of *France* ?  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Or will not thy chastity here thee advance ?  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
What, hast thou forsook thy most amorous trade ?  
Or hast thou left off the game thou hast plaid ?  
Tho’ not one in ten took thee for a Maid,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.”*

[*Duchess of Portsmouth rejoins :*]

“These quirks are too quick, you do put on me *Nell*,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
And thou thine one self, lov’st the sport well,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Then let us not [thus] one another deride,  
For there’s many Gallants that love it beside ;  
But Fortune, I fear, now will down my pride,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.”*

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## Nell Gwyn

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[*Nell Gwynn's remonstrance :*]

" Your beauty and vertu[e]s now seem to decline,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
I know not how soon your fate may be mine ;  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
Now unstring your purse, and be kind to the poor,  
I know that confinement you cannot indure :  
There is nothing on earth that is stable and sure,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la."*

[*Duchess of Portsmouth laments :*]

" You seem, *Nell*, with speed for to post me away,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
But ere I go hence my debts I must pay ;  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
And is not this now a most sorrowful thing,  
That I who had the great world in sling,  
Must now in this plight most mournfully sing ?  
    *With a fa la, la, la, fa, la, la."*

[*Nell Gwyn remembers :*]

" But Madam, from hence you sent treasure away,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
And here I suppose that a while you must stay ;  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
But what I myself have got by my game,  
I freely in *England* expended the same,  
But you have transported yours to your shame,  
    *With a fa, la, la, fa, la, la."*

[*Duchess of Portsmouth also remembers :*]

" But one of my Sisters hath suffer'd before,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
She I do remember was called *Jane Shore*,  
    *With a fa, la, la, la, fa, la, la.*  
For now I am possessed with sorrow and fear,  
And in my sad dreams strange visions appear,  
I have lost my dear friend that I loved so dear,  
    *With a fa, la, fa, la, la."*

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## Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth

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In March, 1682, the Duchess of Portsmouth paid a visit to France, and it was rumoured, wrongly, that she was not returning to England. She was received with much honour at the French Court as befitted one of whom Barillon had written to Louis XIV. : "The truth about her is, that she has shown great, constant and intelligent zeal for your Majesty's interests, and given me numberless useful hints and pieces of information." The way in which she was received was so gratifying to Charles that he sent to the French King "his best thanks for the kindness he had shown to the Duchess of Portsmouth."

It is generally believed that the Duchess went abroad to take the waters of Bourbon, she being then in bad health, having perhaps, as one writer, as a rule none too mealy-mouthed, puts it cautiously, "suffered through the miscellaneous nature of the King's amours."

Others, however, said that, driven by strong passion, she went to France in pursuit of her lover. This is indicated in "The Duchess of Portsmouth's Garland : "

"When Portsmouth did from England fly, to follow her Vandome,  
Thus all along the Galley the monarch made his moan,  
O Chantillion, for charity, send me my Cleaveland home !  
Go, Nymph, so foolish and unkind, your wandering Knight  
pursue,  
And leave a love-sick King behind, so faithful and so true,  
You Gods, when you made Love so blind, you should have  
lam'd him too."

The "Vandome," who was the lover of the Duchess of Portsmouth, was not Louis Joseph, the Duke of Penthièvre, Marshal Vendôme, but his brother, Philippe,

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## Nell Gwyn

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the Grand Prior of Vendôme, who came, or was sent, to England in 1680, for the purpose of directing the influence of the Duchess in the right direction, that is to say, the direction desired by the French Court. The Grand Prior was a grandson of Henry IV. and a cousin of Louis XIV., and so was well received by Charles II. Well supplied with money, a dashing gambler, handsome, and versed in love-making, society took him to its arms. That he was a gallant was all in his favour, but when he turned his attentions to the Duchess, and she accepted them gladly, the King thought that this was going too far and dismissed him from the Court.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE DUCHESS MAZARIN

Hortense Mancini.—A description of her great beauty.—Desired in marriage by Charles II. and Pedro II.—Married Marquis de la Meilleraye, who is created Duc Mazarin.—Her enormous dowry from her uncle, Cardinal Mazarin.—The Duke's mad jealousy.—The Duchess applies for a separation—She is temporarily immured in a convent.—Her practical jokes there.—She escapes from France—The Chevalier de Rohan.—Becomes the mistress of Courberville.—Charles Emmanuel II. of Savoy interested in her—She takes as her lover the Abbé de Saint-Réal.—She comes to England.—The alarm of the seraglio.—The Duchess of Cleveland retires.—The Duchess of Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn.—The struggle for supremacy.—The Duchess Mazarin becomes a mistress of the King.—The despair of the Duchess of Portsmouth—Jane Myddleton.—Mme. de Courcelles.—Her account of her own charms.

**A**RIVAL to Nell Gwyn, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and the minor fry of the King's harem, appeared on the scene at the beginning of 1676 in the person of the Duchess Mazarin, who arrived in London "dressed as a cavalier, accompanied by two women and five men, without counting a little Moor, who takes his meals with her," as the French Ambassador, Ruvigny, who had succeeded Colbert de Croissy, reported to Paris. This was Hortense, the fourth of the five lovely Mancini sisters, nieces of Cardinal Mazarin.

The description of her by Saint-Evremond, quoted by Mr. Noel Williams, is indeed ravishing :

"She is one of those Roman beauties who in no way

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## Nell Gwyn

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resemble your dolls of France. The colour of her eyes has no name ; it is neither blue, nor grey, nor altogether black, but a combination of all the three ; they have the sweetness of blue, the gaiety of grey, and, above all, the fire of black. There are none in the world so sweet. There are none in the world so serious and so grave when her thoughts are occupied with any serious object. They are large, well-set, full of fire and intelligence.

“ All the movements of her mouth are full of charm, and the strangest grimaces become her wonderfully, when she imitates those who make them. Her smiles would soften the hardest heart and ease the most profound depression of mind ; they almost entirely change her expression, which is naturally haughty, and spread over it a certain tincture of sweetness and kindness, which reassures those hearts which her charms have alarmed.

“ Her nose, too, which without doubt is incomparably well turned and perfectly proportioned, imparts a noble and lofty air to her whole physiognomy. The tone of her voice is so harmonious and agreeable that none can hear her speak without being sensibly moved. Her complexion is so delicately clear that I cannot believe that anyone who examined it closely can deny it to be whiter than the driven snow. Her hair is of a glossy black, with nothing harsh about it. To see how naturally it curls as soon as it is let loose, one would say it rejoiced to shade so lovely a head. She has the finest turned countenance that a painter ever imagined.”

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## The Duchess Mazarin

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Charles II. was an old admirer of Hortense. When he was in exile before the Restoration, he fell a victim to her beauty and her charm when she was in her early teens and wanted to marry her. Mazarin, who may have thought Charles's chance of regaining the English throne a very slender one, would not, however, entertain the matter. Nor would he entertain the overtures of Pedro, the Regent of Portugal, who later ascended the throne of that country as Pedro II.

Actually, when she was in her sixteenth year, the Cardinal gave her in marriage—the actual date is February 28, 1661—to a French nobleman, the Marquis de la Meilleraye, who, at his request, was created by Louis XIV. Duc Mazarin—not Duc de Mazarin, as it is usually written. It is said that her uncle, who died ten days after the marriage, bestowed upon her a dowry of no less than twenty-eight million francs.

The Duchess had a love of adventure and a desire for romance, to which she gave full vent. The Duke was rather mad in an extremely irritating way, and suffered so distressingly from religious mania that, as Saint-Simon wrote of him, "Piety poisoned all the talents that Nature had bestowed on him." Apparently sex was his abhorrence. He smashed with a hammer the nude statues in his galleries and painted out the nude figures in his pictures; and he would not let the women servants perform an operation so indelicate as milking the cows.

He was presumably in love with his wife, but his jealousy made her life unbearable. "I could not

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## Nell Gwyn

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“speak to a servant but he was dismissed the same day,” she wrote in her memoirs. “I could not receive two visits but he was forbidden the house. If I showed any preference for one of my maids, she was at once taken away from me. He would have liked me to see no one in the world except himself. Above all, he could not endure that I should see either his relations or my own—the latter because they had begun to take my part; his own, because they no more approved of his conduct than did mine.”

As may be imagined, this sort of conduct made life impossible for a high-spirited young woman, who had her own views of life. After five years of married life, Hortense appealed for a separation to the courts. Before the action came on, she retired to the Abbey of Celles, but the Duke removed her to the Convent des Filles de Sainte-Marie, where the rules were very strict. Here she met the Marquise de Courcelles, and it is to be feared that these two young people gave the nuns a lively time.

The accounts of these proceedings that were circulated were declared by the Duchess to be much exaggerated. “As Madame de Courcelles was very amiable and very entertaining, I had the complacency to join with her in some pleasantries which she played upon the nuns,” she related afterwards. “A hundred ridiculous stories were carried to the King, who was told that we put ink in the holy-water basin to bespatter the good ladies, that we ran through the dormitories, accompanied by a pack of hounds, crying, ‘Tayaut! Tayaut!’ and such-like things, all of

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## The Duchess Mazarin

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which were absurdly false or grossly exaggerated. For example, having asked for some water to wash our feet, the nuns disapproved and refused our request, just as if we were there to observe the regulations." Mark the sequel : " It is true that we filled with water a large coffer which stood in our dormitory, and, the boards of the floor being very loosely joined together, the water which overflowed leaked through the wretched floor and wetted the beds of the good sisters. This accident was talked about as if it had been something which we had done of design."

Anyhow, whether these things were the result of accident or design, they proved too much for the equanimity of the holy sisters, who apparently petitioned for the removal of these turbulent spirits. The Duchess was sent again to Celles, where she remained until a separation was granted. Against this decision her husband appealed, and she, fearing the decree might be rescinded, fled from Paris, disguised as a man, and made her way to Geneva, accompanied by a waiting-maid similarly attired, and one M. Courberville.

Her proceedings in the south of Europe were nothing short of scandalous. While she was in Paris it was thought that the Chevalier de Rohan (who is mentioned elsewhere in this book) was her lover, and soon after she arrived in Italy she made no secret of the fact that she was the mistress of Courberville. Her behaviour was so outrageous as, even in those days of latitude, to estrange society.

Later she went to Savoy, where she received a

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## Nell Gwyn

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heartly welcome from Charles Emmanuel II., who had earlier wanted to marry her. He treated her royally, and visited her at the palace at Chambéry which he had lent her, and it was assumed that she rewarded him for his lavish generosity in the usual way. The attentions of the ruler of Savoy did not content her, and she took into her suite the historian César Vichaud, who for some reason or other—he was not a priest—called himself the Abbé de Saint-Réal. When in 1675 Charles Emmanuel died, it was intimated to her that her presence was no longer desired in Savoy.

Thereupon she, accompanied by Saint-Réal, came to England.

“The Duke of York received at his house yesterday the Duchess of Mazarin, who received at the same time the compliments of the King of England through the Earl of Sunderland,” Ruvigny wrote to Pomponne. “Everyone here is in expectation of some important changes, and it is believed that a lady so extolled cannot fail to be the cause of adventures. M. de Grammont, who has undertaken the care of this lady’s conduct, considers her as beautiful as ever. For myself, who have not seen her since the first days of her marriage, and who have retained the recollection of what she was then like, I have observed some alteration, which, however, does not prevent her being more beautiful than ever. . . . She is to all appearances a finely developed young girl. I never saw anyone who so well defies the power of time and vice to disfigure. At the age of fifty she will have the satisfaction of thinking, when she looks at her mirror,

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## The Duchess Mazarin

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that she is as lovely as she ever was in her life." She was then, however, but thirty years of age.

Great was the excitement caused in Court circles by the arrival of the Duchess Mazarin. Everyone knew, of course, that the King had once wanted to marry her, and everyone wondered what would happen now. Her reputation for gallantry had naturally preceded her. Her appearance created an immense sensation. Every roué in the neighbourhood of Whitehall pursued her with attentions, to which at the moment she gave little heed, for she at once recaptured the King's admiration.

That agreeable historian, Miss Strickland, has written: "The arrival of the Duchess Mazarin in England, who, when Hortense Mancini, had inspired the King with a passion so intense that he had offered to make her his wife, must have been an alarming event to the Queen, who naturally apprehended a formidable rival in one whom he had thus regarded. The lapse of fifteen years had, however, banished every particle of romance from the heart of Charles: love was with him no longer a sentiment. He gave Hortense a residence at Chelsea and a pension of £4,000 a year, and visited her occasionally, but her influence never equalled that of the Duchess of Portsmouth."

It is doubtful, however, if the Queen had not got beyond the stage of worrying about the King's amours. It is certain that, for a while at least, Hortense was Charles's mistress. The seraglio was in despair. The Duchess of Cleveland, whose day was over anyhow,

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## Nell Gwyn

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retired into the country, shaking the dust of the Court, so to speak, off her. The Duchess of Portsmouth sulked in her tent.

Only Nell Gwyn laughed and stood her ground, confident in herself and her attractions in the long run. She did not resent Charles's infidelities, knowing that they were inevitable, and she saw the chance of having another little joke at the expense of the Duchess of Portsmouth. To the general delight, Nell one day, characteristically, appeared at Court dressed in black—explaining that she was in mourning for Louise and her dead hopes.

Poets raved about the Duchess Mazarin, and lampooners wrote about her with the freedom customary in the days of the Stuarts :

“ When through the world fair Mazarin had run  
Bright as her fellow-traveller, the sun,  
Hither at length the Roman eagle flies,  
As the last triumph of her conquering eyes  
As heir to Julius, she may pretend  
A second time to make this nation bend ;  
But Portsmouth, springing from the ancient race  
Of Britons, which the Saxon here did chase,  
As they great Cæsar did oppose, makes head,  
And does against this new invader lead.”

Charles asked Louis XIV. to insist on the Duke making Hortense a more suitable allowance, and himself drew heavily on his Privy Purse for her. The interest the King took in her met with the usual reward. “ I have just learned,” de Ruvigny wrote to Louis on March 12, 1676, “ that there's certain and secret intelligence between the King of England



"To the general delight, Nell one day, characteristically, appeared at Court dressed in black—explaining that she was in mourning for Louise and her dead hopes."



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## The Duchess Mazarin

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and the Duchess Mazarin. She carries on her intrigue very quietly with him. Those who had hoped to share in the triumph have not yet had the opportunity they expected."

The Duchess of Portsmouth fought tooth and nail to retain her supremacy. It is said that her anger, which was unbridled, and her jealousy, which knew no bounds, actually affected her looks. She spent a month at Bath to take the waters, and going to dine at Windsor on her return to town, dined with the King, but was not invited to stay the night and had to drive on to London. At this time, she was the laughing stock of society, and when, by an unfortunate accident, she bruised her eye, a jest was made of it, and it was said that she had deliberately blackened her eye to transform herself from a blonde into a brunette like the Duchess Mazarin. At the end of 1676, the influence of Louise de K roualle was almost negligible. Her biographer, Forneron, summarizes a letter from Honor  Courtin to Louvois, written in December :

"Courtin pitied Charles, who wanted to be well with everyone—a hard problem to solve, surrounded, as he was, by jealous women. He had to face the anger of the Duchess of Portsmouth for drinking twice in twenty-four hours to the health of Nell Gwyn, with whom he still often supped, and who still made the Duchess of Portsmouth the butt for her tickling sarcasms. The rakes of the town met the King at her supper table, and said freely before him whatever came uppermost in their heads. As for the Duchess Mazarin, the Court of Versailles was informed by the

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## Nell Gwyn

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watchful Ambassador that Charles went regularly through the going-to-bed ceremony at Whitehall; and when his gentlemen and servants had left his chamber, he got up, dressed, stole off to St. James's Palace, where he arrived after the Duchess's card-parties were over, and did not return to his palace until after five in the morning. It was evident, then, that he did not spend his nights with the Duchess of Portsmouth. He went to see her often in the day-time when he knew she had company with her; but that was all."

It really looked as if the Duchess of Portsmouth was down and out, and it did not make her the happier that no one cared for her or showed her any sympathy—except those who based their hopes upon her return to power. Could anything be more pathetic than the picture unfolded by the French Ambassador in London to Louvois in August, 1676, after she had returned to Whitehall: "I witnessed yesterday evening an incident which aroused in me the greatest pity imaginable, and which would perhaps have touched you, all wise and virtuous though you be. I went to Madame de Portsmouth's apartments. She opened her heart to me, in the presence of two of her waiting-maids. The two maids remained glued against the wall, with downcast eyes. The mistress shed a torrent of tears, and her sighs and sobs interrupted her words. In short, never has a spectacle appeared to me more sad or touching. I remained with her until midnight, and I neglected nothing to restore her courage and to make her

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## The Duchess Mazarin

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understand how much it was to her interest to dissemble her grief."

In the early months of 1677 there was a reconciliation between the Duchesses, but this meant no more than that she of Portsmouth accepted, anyhow for the time being, the ascendancy of the Duchess Mazarin. The state which the latter kept up must have provoked the envy of even the wealthiest families at the Court. Money was spent by her with a prodigality that was remarkable, even in a day when extravagance was a fashion. "She has had a livery made more magnificent than any with which you are acquainted," Courtin wrote. "The lace costs three livres fifteen sols the French ell, and the coats are quite hidden by it. There are nine of them with which to array two porters, six lackeys, and a page; and they cost, with the cravats, two thousand six hundred livres. She keeps an excellent table. In a word, her expenditure far exceeds the two thousand crowns which she receives from her husband. . . . With the appetite which God has given her, she would certainly devour double the income that she has." Courtin, referring to her expenditure, adds: "I do not know how she does it, but these extraordinary expenses appear to me a little suspicious." It is a reasonable assumption that the means for this extravagance were, in part, supplied by Charles.

As regards Nell Gwyn, the Duchesses knew that neither severally nor by uniting their efforts could they remove her from the royal favour—she had an attraction for the King that never waned. They

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## Nell Gwyn

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were successful, however, in repelling others who aspired to the honour of becoming the mistress of Charles. One of these was Jane Myddleton, who at this time was in her sixteenth year, and was brought to Court by her mother in order to capture the attentions of the monarch. Another was the friend of the Duchess Mazarin, who has already been mentioned, Madame de Courcelles, who without any false modesty has put on record an account of her undoubtedly attractive appearance : " I am tall. I have an admirable figure. I have rather fine eyes, which I never quite open, and this is a charm that renders my glance the sweetest and most tender in the world. I have a well-formed bosom. I have divine hands, passable arms, that is to say, a little thin, but I find consolation for this misfortune in the pleasure of having the most beautiful legs in the world."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE DEATH OF NELL GWYN

The death of Charles II.—Nell Gwyn's affection for him.—Charles's last words. "Let not poor Nelly starve"—James II.'s kindness to her—Nell Gwyn not allowed to put her house in mourning—Her temporary financial straits.—She sells the "Ruperta" necklace—Appeals to James II. for aid—Charles II. to have created her Countess of Greenwich.—James II. responds to her appeals for money—Nothing known of the last years—Her illness—Her death.—Her burial in St Martin's-in-the-Fields.—Dr. Tenison preaches the funeral service.—Nell Gwyn's repentance—James II. charges the expenses of her funeral to the Secret Service Fund—Nell Gwyn's generosity and charity—Samuel Butler.—Dryden.—Thomas Otway.—Chelsea Hospital.—Acts as the King's Almoner.

**C**HARLES II. died on February 6, 1685, and was mourned by Nell Gwyn, who, as has been said, had a very sincere affection for him. As Sir George Etherege wrote :

"Nor would his Nelly long be his survivor.  
Alas ! who now was good enough to drive her ?  
So she gave way to her consuming grief,  
Which brought her past all galley-pot relief,  
Howe'er it were, as the old women say,  
' Her time was come, and then there's no delay ' :  
So down the Stygian Lake she dropt."

Tradition, supported by the assertions of Evelyn and Burnet, declares that Charles II., on his death-bed, asked his brother to be kind to the Duchess of Cleveland, and especially to the Duchess of

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## Nell Gwyn

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Portsmouth, but above all laid upon him the injunction : " Let not poor Nelly starve."

James II., who had always liked Nell Gwyn, did his best by her, and saw that she did not starve ; like Charles, he helped her not unlavishly to public moneys, as will presently be related.

There were, however, certain things he would not permit to her, as the following letter shows :

SIR CYRIL WYCHE TO DUKE OF ORMONDE.

*February 17, 1685.*

The Duchess of Portsmouth, desiring protection, as it is said, was answered she should be defended against insolence, but could not be protected against paying her debts, and as well as her Grace Nell Gwyn has been forbid to put her house in mourning, or to use that sort of nails about her coach and chair which it seems is kept as a distinction for the Royal Family<sup>y</sup> on such occasions, and had else been put on by her command.\*

There is no doubt that Nell Gwyn, who was always careless of money, found herself in serious financial straits a very short time after the death of Charles II. It may be assumed that in spite of a very considerable income and many special gifts, she lived, so far as ready money was concerned, from hand to mouth. It is certain that she had about this time to dispose of the famous " Ruperta " necklace which she had purchased from Margaret Hughes and Margaret's

\* Ormonde MSS., N.S., VII., 323. (Historical MSS. Commission.

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## The Death of Nell Gwyn

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daughter Ruperta for £4,520, in order to meet in part the most pressing claims of her tradesmen. Even the proceeds of this sale did not suffice, and if she was not actually arrested for debt in 1685, she was certainly outlawed. Tradesmen who were willing to trust her to any amount while Charles was alive were in a great hurry to collect their debts after his death. It was when she was in this very awkward situation that she applied to James II. in the following terms :

“ Had I suffered for my God as I have done for y<sup>r</sup> Brother and y<sup>e</sup> I shuld not have neede ether of y<sup>r</sup> kindness or justis to me. I beseech you not to doe Any thing to the settling of my buisness till I speake w<sup>th</sup> you, to apoynt me by Mr. Grahams wher I may speake with you privetly. God make you as happy as my soule prayes you may be.”\*

The following letter, which must have been written shortly after the other, shows that James II., though he may not have given her audience, did certainly give her pecuniary comfort, and it is known from the “ Secret Service Accounts of Charles II. and James II.,” published by the Camden Society in 1851, that the arrangements were made by Richard Graham (the “ Mr. Grahams ” of the first letter), who was apparently the Colonel Graham attached to the King’s Household.

In the letter printed below, the passage to “ Had he [Charles II.] lived he tould me before he dyed that the world shuld see by what he did for me that he had both love and value for me, and that he did not do for me,” has, it may be assumed, reference to the

\* B. M. Add. MSS., 21,483, f. 27.

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peerage which it is believed it was the intention of the deceased monarch to bestow on her. It is said that the title chosen was the Countess of Greenwich.

Authority for this statement is to be found in a passage in a manuscript book, "The Royall Cedar," by Frederick van Bossen, which is dated 1688 :

"Charles the 2d. naturall sone of King Charles the 2d. borne of Hellenor or Nelguine, dawghter to Thomas Guine, a capitane of ane antient family in Wales, who should bein advanced to be Countes of Greeniez, but hindered by the king's death, and she lived not long after his Matie. Item, he was advanced to the title of Duke Stablane and Earle of Berward. He is not married."

The second letter to James II. is as follows :

"This world is not capable of giving me greater joy and happynes than y<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>ties</sup> favour, not as you are King and soe have it in y<sup>r</sup> power to doe me good, having never lowed y<sup>r</sup> brother and y<sup>r</sup> self upon that account, but as to y<sup>r</sup> persons. Had he lived he tould me before he dyed that the world shuld see by what he did for me that he had both love and value for me and that he did not doe for me, as my mad lady Woster. He was my frind and allowed me to tell him all my grifes and did like a frind advise and tould me who was my frind and who was not. S<sup>r</sup>, the honour y<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>ties</sup> has don me by Mr. Grahams has given me great comfort not by the present you sent me to releve me out of the last extremety but by the kind expresions hee made me from you of y<sup>r</sup> kindness to me, w<sup>ch</sup> to me is above al things in this

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## The Death of Nell Gwyn

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world, having, God knows, never loved y<sup>r</sup> brother or y<sup>r</sup> selfe interestedly. All you doe for me shall be yours, it being my resolution never to have any interest but y<sup>rs</sup>, and as long as I live to serve you and when I dye to dye praying for y<sup>u</sup>.”\*

Here may be given some extracts from the Secret Service accounts of the reign of James II. :

1685, September.—To Richard Graham, Esq., to be by him paid over to several tradesmen, creditors of Mrs. Ellen Gwynne, in satisfac'on of their debts for which the said Ellen stood outlawed, £729 2s. 3d.

1685, December.—To Ellinor Gwyn bounty £500.

To the said Ellinor Gwynne more £500.

1687, October.—To Sir Stephen Fox, for so much by him paid to Sir Robert Clayton in full of 3,774 *li*, 2s. 6d., for redeeming the mortgage of Bestwoode Park made to Sir John Musters, to settle the same upon Mrs. Ellen Gwynn for life, and after her death upon the Duke of St. Albans and his issue male with the reversion in the crowne . . . £1,256 os. 2d.

Of Nell Gwyn's life after the death of Charles II. little is known about it save what has already been said concerning her want of pence—which, however, must have been only temporary, because, according to Narcissus Luttrell, she left a considerable estate to her son, the Duke of St. Albans, while another contemporary, Sir Charles Lyttelton, wrote of her in 1687 as “thought to be worth £100,000 ; £2,000 in revenue and the rest in jewels and plate.”

In Luttrell's “Historical Narrative” there is an

\* Add. MSS., 21,483, f. 98.

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## Nell Gwyn

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entry on March 20, 1687 : Mrs. Ellen Gwyn hath been dangerously ill and her recovery is much doubt," and Alice Hatton, writing two days later, remarks that "Mrs. Nelly is dying of an apoplexy." On March 24 John Verney said, in a letter to Sir Richard Verney, "Mrs. Eleanor Gwin lyes a-dying." However, her medical attendant, Christianus Harrell, who had been one of the late King's physicians and had attended him in his last illness, contrived to save her, anyhow for a while ; and on March 29, Sir Charles Lyttelton wrote : "Mrs. Nelly has been dying of an apoplexy. She has now come to her sense on one side, for the other is dead of a palsy." She only survived until the following November 13, when she passed away in the house in Pall Mall at the age of thirty-six.

Four days later Nell Gwyn was, in accordance with a wish expressed in her will, buried in the parish church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, where her mother had been interred nine years before.

The Vicar of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields was Dr. Thomas Tenison, and he preached the sermon at her funeral, in which sermon, tradition has it, he spoke warmly of her charities, her real goodness of heart, her sincere repentance, and her pious end—it may be, also of her temptations.

Someone, who later was envious of the growing influence at Court of Dr. Tenison (who afterwards was become Archbishop of Canterbury), dwelt maliciously to Queen Mary on the encomiums he had bestowed on an actress who had led an immoral life. He received a truly royal rebuke. "I have heard as

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## The Death of Nell Gwyn

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much," said Her Majesty. "It is to me a sign that the unfortunate woman died penitent; for if I can read a man's heart through his looks, had Nell Gwyn not made a pious and Christian end, Dr. Tenison could not have been induced to speak well of her."

This is borne out by what Colley Cibber says in his "Apology": "Nell Gwyn's repentance in her last hours, I have been unquestionably informed, appeared in all the contrite symptoms of a Christian sincerity."

James II., kind to Nell Gwyn to the last, took upon himself the expenses of the funeral—at the cost of the State. The following entry is to be found in the "Secret Service Expenses of Charles II. and James II.":

"1688, January. To Roger Hewitt, upon the like sume that would have become due at Xtmas last to Mrs. Ellinor Gwynn, dec'd, on a pencion of 1500*li* per ann. in the name of Francis Gwynne, Esq., to reimburse so much money paid by Sr. Stephen Fox for the funeral of the said Mrs. Gwynn, 375*li*, 0. 0."

So, as she lived, so she died, at the country's expense.

"She is said to have died piously and penitently," Wigmore wrote to Sir George Etherege, then Envoy at Ratisbon, "and, as she dispensed several charities in her life, so she left several legacies at her death."

Jesse says of Nell Gwyn that "she was ever the benefactor of genius in distress," but it may be suggested, without disrespect to the lady, that this was going too far. Yet there are pleasant stories about her generosity and her impulsive kindness.

Thus, in the biography of her published in 1792 the following incident is narrated concerning Samuel

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## Nell Gwyn

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Butler, the author of "Hudibras," who was neglected by the Court :

"In behalf of this gentleman, Nell frequently remonstrated, and represented his story and circumstances with the utmost warmth to his Majesty. In the immediate hours of her ministry, she often mentioned him, but was still so unlucky as to be unsuccessful. Firmly resolved to serve Mr. Butler, for whose inimitable wit she had the greatest veneration, she applied to Duke Villiers, who was then at the head of taste, and was capable, independent of his Majesty's interest, to provide for him. After long solicitation, she prevailed on his Grace to grant an interview to Mr. Butler, and a Mr. Wycherley, who was a favourite with the Duke, to introduce him. Mr. Wycherley, who was well acquainted with the great merit, as well as the distress, of Butler, readily embraced the first opportunity of promoting his friend."

The story may well be true, though it is difficult to believe that "she had the greatest veneration for Butler's inimitable wit"—that clearly is the touch of the eighteenth-century biographer. Certainly, she did her best to befriend Dryden, whose plays had helped her to her high position, and those other dramatists, Nathaniel Lee and Thomas Otway. It is believed that she appointed Otway tutor to her elder son, and there is a reference to this in the contemporary "Essay of Scandal" :

"Then for that cub, her son and heir,  
Let him remain in Otway's care."

Nell Gwyn suffered the fate that befell all of her

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day who were in positions of influence at Court, and minor writers sought her favour by dedicating books to her.

That popular playwright and novelist, Mrs. Aphra Behn, in 1679 dedicated to her her play, *The Feigned Courtesans*. Nell Gwyn may have known her, for she was, in the early part of the reign of Charles II., a not infrequent visitor at Whitehall, and she was, indeed, sent over by the King to the Netherlands as a spy before the outbreak of the Dutch War. It is of interest to note that she heard of the intention of de Witt to send a Dutch fleet up the Thames, that she contrived to get this valuable information through to London, and that it was ignored—with what result is known. Aphra Behn knew well how to be adulatory, as the following passages from the dedication show :

“ Your permission has enlightened me, and I with shame look back on my past ignorance which suffered me not to pay an adoration long since where there was so very much due ; yet even now, though secure in my opinion, I make this sacrifice with infinite fear and trembling, well knowing that so excellent and perfect a creature as yourself differs only from the divine powers in this—the offerings made to you ought to be worthy of you, whilst they accept the will alone.

“ Besides all the charms, the attractions and powers of your sex, you have beauties peculiar to yourself—an eternal sweetness, youth and air which never dwell in any face but yours. You never appear but you gladden the hearts of all that have the happy

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## Nell Gwyn

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purpose to see you, as if you were made on purpose to put the whole world into good humour. Heaven has bestowed on you two noble branches, whom you have permitted to wear those glorious titles which you yourself generously neglected."

The above, however, is not a whit more flattering than the dedication anthem five years earlier by Thomas Duffet, preceding his play, *The Spanish Rogue*, in which he refers to her as "of the most perfect beauty and the greatest goodness in the world," and observes that "doing good is not your nature but your business." As if this were not enough, he adds :

"Nature, almost overcome by art, has in yourself rallied all her scattered forces, and on your charming brow sits smiling at their slavish toils which yours and her envious foes endure ; striving in vain with the fading weak supplies of art to rival your beauties, which are ever the same and almost incomparable."

The "almost" in the last sentence seems to indicate that Duffet thought he had perhaps gone a little too far and had better hedge.

No such scruple attacked Robert Whitcombe, who in 1678 dedicated "To the illustrious Madam Ellen Gwin," his book, "Janua Divorum, or, The Lives and Histories of the Heathen Gods, Goddesses and Demi-Gods."\* The author is simply magnificent in his fervour and his outrageous compliments follow hard on each other's heels :

\* There is no copy of this volume in the British Museum, and the extracts from the dedication have been taken from Mr. Gordon Goodwin's edition of Cunningham's, "The Story of Nell Gwyn."

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"Your favour is more creditable than ingenuity itself, and an author need not fear the harsh attacks of time and oblivion, whose works have the honour to wear you in their frontispiece. . . . The minutest of your incomparable perfections could not make so swift an incursion into my thoughts, as not to find them sufficiently prepared with a reverence and adoration agreeable to so glorious a reception.

"I knew that curious Nature had extended her endeavours in the formation of your delicate body, enjoined both it and every limb about you to an exact symmetry and pleasing proportion. . . . You are nobly attended with an illustrious troop of sublime thoughts and fair ideas, which tacitly invading your great mind, fill it with that satisfaction and delight which none but a soul as large as your own is capable to conceive. . . . Apollo told me that in you only he should meet with his primitive wisdom. Mercury, with his pristine wit. Juno, with her old sovereignty or greatness of mind. Venus, with her delicate beauty. And Alcides, with his godlike courage and brave spirit. And, in short, they affirmed, that all those noble qualifications for which they were formerly deified, were only concentrated in yourself."

So fine a piece of imaginative writing as Robert Whitcombe's dedication is too good to be lost.

That Nell Gwyn was kind-hearted is generally accepted. Very popular is the incident that has been reported by Granger in the "Biographical History," which he states is a "known fact": "As she was one day going through the City—if we are to be precise,

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the spot is alleged to be Ludgate Hill—seeing a clergyman being hurried by some bailiffs to prison, she got out of her coach, made some inquiries, and paid on the spot the debts of the worthy man. This is just the sort of thing she would have done.”

“Nell Gwyn,” says Leigh Hunt in “The Town,” “is said to have suggested to her royal lover the building of Chelsea Hospital, and to have made him a present of the ground for it.” Thornbury, in the “History of London,” retails the story that one day a wounded and destitute soldier hobbled up to her coach-window to ask alms, and that so pained her to see a man who had fought for his country begging his bread in the street that she prevailed upon Charles II. to establish at Chelsea a permanent home for military invalids. This is very pretty, but unfortunately it is not confirmed by fact. General Hutt, who was responsible for the official “Early History of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea” says definitely :

“A sentimental tradition has often ascribed the foundation of the establishment of Chelsea Hospital to the charitable intercession of Nell Gwyn, but, though the story has been often repeated the most careful inspection into the records of the period fails any way to authenticate its truth.

“Newcourt, author of a History of the Diocese of London (of which he was Vicar-General), a most accurate writer, who lived at the time and who mentions the hospital at some length, never in any way alludes to this story. Evelyn, from whose journal much valuable information is derived and by whose

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aid many details connected with the sale and purchase of the early hospital lands have been accurately traced, is equally silent on this point. Stow and Pennant make no mention of it, while Lysons treats the anecdote as one of very doubtful authenticity. It is far more probable that the story had its origin in the practice of the time of lavishing on every Court favourite the grossest flattery, for which the founding of Chelsea Hospital afforded a good opportunity. Part of the tradition can be proved to be fallacious, and historical truth seems to require that the whole shall be relegated to the list of so many exploded legends."

Charles II. certainly believed in her generous nature, and occasionally used her as his almoner. It is recorded, to give one instance, that on December 11, 1682, "His Majesty has been pleased to give Madam Gwin £100 towards the relief of the late dreadful fire which happened at Wapping." And there is a pleasant proof of her thoughtful kindness in the bequests which she made for the poor debtors.

With these kind words, we may leave "pretty, witty Nell."

## APPENDIXES

### I

#### THE WILL OF NELL GWYN

IN the name of God, Amen. I, Ellen Gwynne, of the parish of St. Martin-in-the-fields, and county of Middlesex, spinster, this 9th day of July, anno Domini 1687, do make this my last will and testament, and do revoke all former wills. First, in hope of a joyful resurrection, I do recommend myself whence I came, my soul into the hands of Almighty God, and my body unto the earth, to be decently buried, at the discretion of my executors, hereinafter named ; and as for all such houses, lands, tenements, offices, places, pensions, annuities, and hereditaments whatsoever, in England, Ireland, or elsewhere, wherein I, or my heirs, or any to the use of, or in trust for me or my heirs, hath, have, or may or ought to have, any estate, right, claim, or demand whatsoever, of fee-simple or freehold, I give and devise the same all and wholly to my dear natural son, his Grace the Duke of St. Alban's, and to the heirs of his body ; and as for all and all manner of my jewels, plate, household stuff, goods, chattels, credits, and other estate whatsoever, I give and bequeath the same, and every part and parcel thereof, to my executors hereafter named, in, upon,

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and by way of trust for my said dear son, his executors, administrators, and assigns, and to and for his and their own sole use and peculiar benefit and advantage, in such manner as is hereafter expressed; and I do hereby constitute the Right Hon. Lawrence, Earl of Rochester, the Right Hon. Thomas, Earl of Pembroke, the Hon. Sir Robert Sawyer, Knight, his Majesty's Attorney-General, and the Hon. Henry Sidney, Esq., to be my executors of this my last will and testament, desiring them to please to accept and undertake the execution thereof in trust as afore-mentioned; and I do give and bequeath to the several persons in the schedule hereunto annexed the several legacies and sums of money therein expressed or mentioned; and my further will and mind, and anything above notwithstanding, is, that if my said dear son happen to depart this natural life without issue then living, or such issue die without issue, then and in such case, all and all manner of my estate above devised to him, and in case my said natural son die before the age of one-and-twenty years, then also all my personal estate devised to my said executors not before then by my said dear son and his issue, and my said executors, and the executors or administrators of the survivor of them, or by some of them otherwise lawfully and firmly devised or disposed of, shall remain, go, or be to my said executors, their heirs, executors, and administrators respectively, in trust of and for answering, paying, and satisfying all and every and all manners of my gifts, legacies, and directions that at any time hereafter, during my life, shall be by me

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anywise mentioned or given in or by any codicils or schedule to be hereto annexed. And lastly, that my said executors shall have, all and every of them, 100*l.* a-piece, of lawful money, in consideration of their care and trouble hercin, and furthermore, all their several and respective expenses and charges in and about the execution of this my will. In witness of all which, I hereunto set my hand and seal, the day and year first above written. E. G.

*Signed, sealed, published, and declared, in the presence of us, who at the same time subscribe our names, also in her presence.*

LUCY HAMILTON SANDYS,  
EDWARD WYBORNE,  
JOHN WARNER,  
WILLIAM SCARBOROUGH,  
JAMES BOOTH.

### FIRST CODICIL.

*The last request of Mrs. Ellenr. Gwynn to his Grace the Duke of St. Alban's, made October the 18th, 1687.*

1. I desire I may be buried in the church of St. Martin's-in-the-fields.

2. That Dr. Tenison may preach my funeral sermon.

3. That there may be a decent pulpit-cloth and cushion given to St. Martin's-in-the-fields.

4. That he [the Duke] would give one hundred pounds for the use of the poor of the said St. Martin's and St. James's, Westminster, to be given into the hands of the said Dr. Tenison, to be disposed of at

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his discretion, for taking any poor debtors of the said parish out of prison, and for cloaths this winter, and other necessities, as he shall find most fit.

5. That for showing my charity to those who differ from me in religion, I desire that fifty pounds may be put into the hands of Dr. Tenison and Mr. Warner, who, taking to them any two persons of the Roman Religion, may dispose of it for the use of the poor of that religion inhabiting the parish of St. James's aforesaid.

6. That Mrs. Rose Forster\* may have two hundred pounds given to her, any time within a year after my decease.

7. That Jo., my porter, may have ten pounds given him.

*My request to his Grace is, further—*

8. That my present nurses may have ten pounds each, and mourning, besides their wages due to them.

9. That my present servants may have mourning each, and a year's wages, besides their wages due.

10. That the Lady Fairborne† may have fifty pounds given to her to buy a ring.

11. That my kinsman, Mr. Cholmley, may have one hundred pounds given to him, within a year after this date.

12. That His Grace would please to lay out twenty

\* The sister of Nell Gwyn. (See pp. 22-23.)

† The widow of Sir Palmes Fairborne (1644-1680), one time Governor of Tangier, and the mother of Admiral Sir Stafford Fairborne. She married again in 1683 Jasper Parton, third son of Robert, first Earl of Yarmouth, and survived until 1694.

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pounds yearly for the releasing of poor debtors out of prison every Christmas-day.

13. That Mr. John Warner may have fifty pounds given him to buy a ring.

14. That the Lady Hollyman may have the pension of ten shillings per week continued to her during the said lady's life.

The following (second) codicil, which escaped the observation of Peter Cunningham, has been discovered by Mr. Gordon Goodwin. It was proved separately, on December 7, 1688, and is registered in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 162, Exton :

The second codicil of Mrs. Ellen Gwinn deceased publicly declared by her before divers creditable witnesses after the making of her last Will and Testament and former Codicil according as it was pronounced in and by the sentence given by the Right Worshipful Sir Richard Raines, Knight, Doctor of Laws, and Master Keeper or Commissary of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury the nineteenth day of July One Thousand and Six Hundred Eighty Eight in a Cause lately depending before him concerning the proof thereof followeth, viz. :

The said Mrs. Ellen Gwinne did give and bequeath to Mrs. Rose Forster, her sister, the sum of two hundred pounds over and above the sum of two hundred pounds which she gave to her the said Rose in her former Codicil.

To Mr. Forster, husband of the said Rose Forster, a ring of the value of forty pounds or forty pounds to buy him a ring.

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To Dr. Harrell [meaning Christianus Harrell, Doctor of Physic, and one of her physicians] twenty pounds

To Mr. Derrick, nephew of the said Dr. Harrell, ten pounds.

To Dr. Le Febure [meaning Joshua Le Febure, Doctor of Physic, and the other of her physicians] twenty pounds respectively to buy them rings.

To Bridget Long, who had been her servant for divers years, the sum of twenty pounds of lawful money of England yearly during her natural life.

To Mrs. Edling [meaning Anne Edling] a new gown.

And Mr. John Warner, her Chaplain, was present with others at the declaring thereof, and that a little before the declaring of the same she being of perfect mind and memory did order or desire the said Mr. Warner to put into writing what she should then declare. And that the said legacies were wrote and read to the deceased and by her approved as part of her last Will and Testament as by the proofs made and sentence given in the said Cause do appear.\*

\* Quoted from Mr. Gordon Goodwin's edition of Peter Cunningham's "The Story of Nell Gwyn."

## II

### AUTHORITIES

THE material for a biography of Nell Gwyn is far from abundant. The contemporary records are few and not vastly valuable, and are especially lacking in any definite and precise knowledge concerning her parentage and her earlier years. As she could scarcely do more with any comfort than scrawl her initials, her correspondence (through the medium of an amanuensis) was limited. Such letters as have been traced are, however, inserted in this volume.

The contemporary references to Nell Gwyn are to be found in the Diaries of Pepys and Evelyn, Burnet's "History of My Own Time," Hamilton's "Memoirs of Grammont," Luttrell's "Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714," Gerald Langbaine the younger's "Account of the English Dramatic Poets," and in the "Letters of Madame de Sévigné." Lord Rochester and Sir George Etherege wrote lampoons about her, and there are various contemporary ballads and broadsheets, some of which are reprinted in this volume.

Further information can be gleaned from the letters printed in the Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, from "Notes and Queries;" from

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the "Secret Service Expenses of Charles II. and James II." and the "Hatton Correspondence" printed by the Camden Society. Nell Gwyn's name occurs in the dedication of plays by Mrs. Aphra Behn and Tom Duffet, and the "History of the Heathen Gods," by Robert Whitcombe. Mr. Henry William Hart printed two documents under the title of "Memorials of Nell Gwyn the Actress and Thomas Otway the Dramatist," which are reproduced in this work.

Something of Nell Gwyn's theatrical career, which, as a matter of fact, lasted only a few years, may be learnt from John Downes's "Roscius Anglicanus, or, An Historical Review of the Stage" (1708)—with this the Supplement by Francis Godolphin Waldron must be read; Colley Cibber's "Apology" (1740); and Betterton's "History of the English Stage from the Restoration to the Present Times, including the Lives, Characters, and Amours of the most eminent Actors and Actresses," which was published by Curll in 1741—the chapter on Nell Gwyn is usually attributed to William Oldys. Allusions will be found in John Genest's "Account of the English Stage, 1660–1830," which appeared in 1832, and in John Doran's "Their Majesties' Servants," 1860.

Other works that have been consulted are Manning and Bray's "History of Surrey," Duncumb's "History of Herefordshire," Gordon Home's "Epsom," Tighe and Davis's "Annals of Windsor," Cunningham's "Handbook of London" (ed. Wheatley), Warburton's "Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers," Agnes Strickland's "Lives of the Queens of England," Clarendon's

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History, Richard Flecknoe's "Epigrams of All Sorts" (1670), Granger's "Biographical History of England," "Memoirs of the Verney Family," Plumptre's "Life of Bishop Ken," Airy's "Charles II.," Anthony Wood's "Life and Times," and, of course, the "Dictionary of National Biography." I have also referred to G. S. Steinman's privately printed work on the Duchess of Cleveland and L. C. Davidson's biography of Queen Catherine.

There are several accounts of the life of Nell Gwyn, but unfortunately not one was written by anyone who knew her or who even saw her. She died in 1687, and the first of the biographies was not published until 1752, when it was printed for F. Stamper in Pope's Head Alley, Cornhill, London: "Memoirs of the Life of Eleanor Gwinn, a celebrated Courtesan in the Reign of Charles II., and Mistress to that Monarch." This catchpenny work, which embroidered some of the traditions that have been handed down, but embroidered in a ridiculous fashion, is for the most part an effort of the author's imagination, and is not in the slightest degree or in any particular reliable. It was reprinted in 1820, with an abominable coloured frontispiece, under which is the legend, "Eleanor Gwinn, otherwise Lady Simcock," and a different title-page, which runs: "Fairburn's edition of the Life, Amours and Exploits of Nell Gwinn, the fortunate Orange-girl, who from the above Low Sphere of Life became the Bosom Friend and Mistress of King Charles the Second (of merry memory), and who, for the comfort of old Soldiers, was the cause of erecting

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Chelsea Hospital, with an account of many Charities she left and good Deeds she performed in her retirement from Public Life and the Stage (as Lady Simcock)."

It was not until 1851 that a serious attempt was made to collect what was actually known about Nell Gwyn. In that year Peter Cunningham, a son of Allan Cunningham the writer, and the author of the "Handbook of London," serialized in the *Gentleman's Magazine* his "Story of Nell Gwyn." In the following year he published it in book-form, when it was, he said, "corrected throughout, and enlarged with such new matter as my own diligence and the kindness of friends, have enabled me to bring together." This book of his, Cunningham said, "must be read as a serious truth, not as a fiction—as a biography, not as a romance. It has no other foundation than truth, and will be heard of hereafter only as it adheres to history." It must be pointed out, however, that it is not entirely reliable. That distinguished student, the late H. B. Wheatley, edited a new edition in 1892, in which he included the author's last corrections and additional notes, and himself supplied new information. In 1903 appeared another issue, admirably edited by Mr. Gordon Goodwin, who carefully revised the work, and to whose research the present writer owes a deep debt of gratitude. The late Cecil Chesterton in 1911 published a new "Story of Nell Gwyn."

There are brief accounts of Nell Gwyn in J. H. Jesse's "Memoirs of the Court of England during the Reign of the Stuarts," Allan Fea's "Beauties of the

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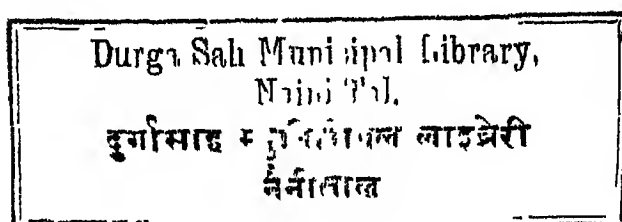
Seventeenth Century," in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and by Joseph Knight in the "Dictionary of National Biography."

I have especially consulted the following valuable works that contain much information about Nell Gwyn and her contemporaries: Mr. P. W. Sergeant's "My Lady Castlemaine," Mr. H. Noel Williams' "Rival Sultanas: Nell Gwyn and Louise de Kéroualle," and M. H. Forneron's "Louise de Kéroualle: Duchess of Portsmouth."

I wish to acknowledge the kind assistance in the preparation of some parts of this work of Mr. Percy Cross Standing.

LEWIS MELVILLE.

London, *September*, 1923.



PRINTED AT  
THE CHAPEL RIVER PRESS,  
KINGSTON, SURINAM